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ISSUE
427

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AUGUST 2016

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 427!

It's been a rough time for **DC Comics** lately, and it is looking like crunch time for this legendary publisher. Sales were in free fall for the comic range with the **New 52** having finally shed most of the younger readers that latched onto this rebranding as a jump-on point. Sadly, many of the old faithful had also drifted away due to this hipper and more youthful approach, leaving DC with the difficult decision of either moving ahead with the new status quo or reverting back to the old continuity in order to lure back the old guard. With **DC Rebirth**, it appears that DC has opted for a shit bag shuffle that tries to do both. Retaining some of the popular aspects of the **New 52**, whilst reverting back to some of the pre-**Flashpoint**-era - even bringing back the original Wally West. Time will tell if it is successful but initial sales are good, and I did enjoy the one-shot **DC Rebirth** that launched this *revertboot*, or whatever you want to call it.

DC has also had a nightmare at the cinema. Whilst **Marvel Studios** continue to milk their winning formula, DC hit yet another bump in the road with **Batman v Superman**. A movie that countered some of the problems of **Man of Steel** whilst creating some problems of its own. At this stage, DC need a hit, and with the lacklustre performance of the heroes it now seems time to bring on the bad guys.

I got into the **Suicide Squad** back in the mid-eighties after **Crisis on Infinite Earths** kick-started the new modern era of DC. **Suicide Squad** was great. A *Dirty Dozen* of supervillains all grudgingly fighting to save mankind, and gain a pardon for their crimes. It opened up a new aspect of the DC Universe. One where Amanda Waller represented a government that seemed far dodgier than the capes. It felt like the real world had arrived.

Unlike the (mostly) friendly relationships in the **Justice League**, the members of the squad were always just a few harsh words away from trying to kill each other. This added an edge to proceedings. It mixed things up a little. The introduction of **Harley Quinn** only occurred post-**New 52**, but was an instant hit with fans of the squad. Her introduction may have been recent but it feels like such a natural fit that it feels like she has always been there.

DC has a lot riding on the **Suicide Squad** movie, and we have our fingers crossed that this is the success we all want it to be. **STARBURST**, accordingly, has devoted this issue to the war effort in an attempt to get everyone up to speed with everyone's favourite bad guys. So get reading, and get ready to see **Harley Quinn** brought to life on the big screen.

Also in this issue we get you ready for the **STARBURST International Film Festival**, celebrate the 50th anniversary of **Daleks: Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.** We take a look at *Survivalist Films*, and prepare for the return of **Mr Robot**. All this, your regular columns, and the second ever Saucer Section - a monstrous amount of content! It's big, it's huge, and you are holding it in your hands (The magazine isn't bad, either *pink flute*).

Until next time, keep watching the weird and wonderful,


Jordan Royce
EDITOR





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FEEDBACK

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STAR

MERMATES

Last Friday, STARBURST Issue 426 arrived in the post as expected. However, instead of giving you the usual 'I rushed to open it' garb, I sat there for a few days because as soon as I got home I had to rush to get my six-year-old son to hospital who was diagnosed with diabetes shortly after our arrival there.

It's now Tuesday, and after a manic weekend of bad times and emotional rollercoasters, I was taking a moment to browse through the issue, only to turn to page 124, the Event Profile, and suddenly seeing a picture of me, on stage winning the cosplay competition as Aquaman. For

the first time in a few days this really made me smile again. My son thinks I'm famous now.

Thank you for the much needed cheer up you fantastic people at STARBURST.

Tim Dennant (Tim De Cosplays), EMAIL

We're glad we could cheer you up a little in what was a hard week for you Tim. Your Aquaman costume brought a smile to our faces too. We can see a lot of time and effort must have gone into the costume, and you wear it very well! Have you considered submitting photos to our **READER'S COSPLAY** page [see page 111]?

LETTER

TREK OR TREAT

I loved the latest issue of STARBURST magazine, mainly because of all the new ongoing STAR TREK features and articles it contained, the Saucer Section has made the magazine even better, it will be a great addition to the pack. I was hoping for a STAR TREK BEYOND cover but I understand why GHOSTBUSTERS got covered because it's been about 27 years since the last film was out.

I'm hoping for a 50TH Anniversary STAR TREK cover in the September issue, if not I understand because there is more big films like SUICIDE SQUAD and new TV series

coming up. Many thanks,
Martin Revitt, EMAIL

Thanks for including your mock up of your ideas for a STAR TREK cover. It's nice to see a reader with such shared enthusiasm for STAR TREK, and STARBURST. You can be sure that there will be plenty more TREK to come from us!

GREAT WORK, FELLA!

Massively enjoyed the STARBURST radio show this week. I must say the two of you are the perfect foil for each other, bringing expertise and laughs to the show in equal measure. I particularly liked your oral dissection of the bloke who



whinged to you via email, that was priceless!

The new issue is fantastic, I'm about half way through and the pieces on CONFINED and THE PURGE are excellent reading.

Keep up the ace work.

Simon Rance, EMAIL

Shauna says: "Expertise and laughs"? You must have had the wrong channel, mate!

Ahh yes, the listener who had a problem with our northern accents. I assume you are northern too? Which part of the country is EMAIL anyway?

S'NO QUEEN

Thank you for printing my letter 'Desperately Seeking Snow Queen' [Issue #415]. In 2014, there was an exhibition at the Lowry in Salford about BBC children's programmes, I wondered if this would show anything of the 1976 SNOW QUEEN, so I decided to go. It turns out it didn't, but it was still an interesting and worthwhile journey. I was interviewed by some young filmmakers, who looked like students. They were pretty interested to hear I had come all the way from the Isle of Man to see the exhibition, quite a complement for the people behind it.

Ian Ellis, ISLE OF MAN

It's nice to hear from you again Ian, and to hear about your progress in the quest for the SNOW QUEEN, it seems to be as elusive as the missing DOCTOR WHO episodes!

We visited the same exhibition, only we didn't have to travel so far, we are lucky in Manchester, we get all sorts!

THE FARCE AWAKENS

We also had correspondence from a regular to the **FEEDBACK** page; Yves Kapreles Albrechts, AKA Darth Albrechts, AKA Kapreles Ren.

Hi! Thanks for making my last letter the 'Star Letter'. Enclosed an old zine I did several years ago + nonsense, why? No reason really, I just hope I'll make you laugh, cheers,
Kapreles, BELGIUM

Here is an extract from his **"STAR WARS: THE FARCE AWAKENS"**;



It's not quite like that but thanks Darth Kapreles! Haha!

Are you a COMIC ARTIST and want to see your work featured in STARBURST?

Drop us an email at showcasestrips@starburstmagazine.com and we'll print our favourite every month

STARBURST

NEXT ISSUE: 428 ON SALE FROM AUGUST 19TH

THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE
BEST (AND WORST)
OF THIS MONTH'S
MOVIE / TV NEWS



MARVEL

Whilst all has been relatively quiet on the Marvel front this month, **Spider-Man: Homecoming** is the big exception. The solo movie for Tom Holland's Wallcrawler has been filling out its cast even further, with Donald Glover, Abraham Attah, Kenneth Choi, Martin Starr, Hannibal Buress, Logan Marshall-Green, Michael Mando, and Bokeem Woodbine being added to Jon Watts' movie; **The Wolf of Wall Street**'s Choi, who has already actually appeared in the MCU as one of Captain America's Howling Commandos, will be playing the Principal of Peter Park's school, Midtown High; **Prometheus**' Marshall-Green is believed to be the film's secondary villain, who looks like being C-lister extraordinaire The Tinkerer; **Fargo**'s Woodbine is playing a 'bad guy' of some form; and then there are unknown roles for **Community**'s Glover, **Beasts of No Nation**'s Attah, **Silicon Valley**'s Starr, comedian Buress, and **Better Call Saul**'s Mando. The name of Donald Glover will grab the attention of many fans, for he was previously rumoured to be up for the role of Miles Morales should this latest cinematic Spider-Man not be Peter Parker. Morales, of course, took over the famed Spidey mantle in the Ultimate Universe following the death of Parker. These new additions join Holland's Spidey, Marisa Tomei's Aunt May, Robert Downey Jr.'s Tony Stark, Michael Keaton's villain (believed to be Adrian Toomes/Vulture), Zendaya, Michael Barbieri, Laura Harrier, and Tony Revolori. To be directed by **Cop Car**'s Watts, **Spider-Man: Homecoming** is currently set for July 7th, 2017.

Moving away from **Spider-Man: Homecoming** but still sticking with ol' Webhead's world, and new reports indicate that Sony Pictures is still looking at putting out a Silver Sable movie. Before Sony and Marvel Studios came to a deal that allowed Spidey to appear in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, particularly before **The Amazing Spider-Man 2** flopped, there were plans for a whole host of Spider-Man-related movies. At that point

in time, Sony announced **The Amazing Spider-Man 3**, **The Amazing Spider-Man 4**, **Venom**, and **The Sinister Six**. All of those films were ultimately scrapped following the poor response to **The Amazing Spider-Man 2**, but then, as part of the infamous Sony e-mail leak, came details of plans for a Silver Sable-driven movie. Well recent reports claim that the studio still has plans to move forward with that picture at some point in the future. In fact, **Shame** and **Suffragette**'s Abi Morgan has been hired to pen a screenplay for just such an outing. Silver Sable herself is a character who often verges on the edge of right and wrong. In the simplest terms, she's a bit like certain depictions of Black Widow, being a mercenary for hire who often butts heads or teams up with Spidey. The current plan is for any such movie to be put out by Sony Pictures, although the character would then exist in the MCU by proxy even if the film is only handled solely by Sony. In recent months, there have been rumblings that Sony still has plans to put out more films based in the Spider-Man realm, with **Venom** and **The Sinister Six** both still believed to be still possibilities to come to fruition. AP

DC

In terms of Warner Brothers' DC Expanded Universe, the biggest news this month centres on Zack Snyder's **Justice League**. In a surprising move, Snyder's two-part **Justice League** has been restructured into being just one single movie. Additionally, the film itself will have a lighter tone to what we've seen from the DCEU so far, namely **Man of Steel** and **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice**, both also helmed by Snyder. Plot-wise, this past month also seems to indicate that Steppenwolf will be the main villain and that three Mother Boxes will be key to how the film unravels. For those not familiar with Steppenwolf, he's one of the New Gods and is the uncle of Darkseid; one of DC's most powerful villains and someone who is being positioned as this world's 'big bad' much like what has happened with Thanos in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Essentially, Steppenwolf is immortal and has enough powers to cause plenty of problems for the **Justice League**. In other new information, expect Ray Fisher's Cyborg to be 100% CGI when it comes to his costume (err, can anyone say **Green Lantern**?!). Additionally, Willem Dafoe's mystery role in the film is reportedly that of Vulko, an Atlantean who is a mentor to Aquaman. Bringing together Ben Affleck's Batman, Henry Cavill's Superman, Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman, Jason Momoa's Aquaman, Ezra Miller's The Flash, and Ray Fisher's Cyborg, **Justice League** is set for November 10th, 2017.

On other upcoming DC movies, **Justice League Dark** is finally happening... just maybe not as you were hoping. Previously, **Justice League Dark** was a live-action offering that Guillermo del Toro was writing and directing until he had to walk away from the project due to scheduling conflicts. Following del Toro's departure, **JL Dark** was left in a limbo, but now comes word that an animated **Justice League Dark** effort is on the way. This news was revealed after a sneak peek of the film was confirmed to be a part of the bonus features for **Batman: The Killing Joke**. The **Justice League Dark** team debuted as part of DC's New 52 (failed) revitalisation, with the paranormal group made up of the likes of John Constantine, Swamp Thing, Deadman, Zatanna, and Madame Xanadu. At the moment, the future of any live-action outing for the team remains up in the air, but it's expected that the animated **Justice League Dark** will be made available by the time the year's out.

Heading to the small screen, and new additions are plentiful when it comes to The CW's DC output this month. Ahead of

POWER RANGERS



The past few months have seen a flurry of announcements of actors set to play the colourful crime fighters, but then the big news dropped that **Breaking Bad**'s Brian Cranston has signed on to play the team's mentor Zordon in the new film. Not only that, but we've had this moody little teaser poster. Not as garish as we'd expect, we're sure you'll agree?

The **Power Rangers** cast is so far made up of Dacre Montgomery (Jason/Red Ranger), RJ Cyler (Billy/Blue Ranger), Naomi Scott (Kimberly/Pink Ranger), Becky G (Trini/Yellow Ranger), and Ludi Lin (Zack/Black Ranger). **The Hunger Games**' Elizabeth Banks will be playing the villainous Rita Repulsa. Directed by Dean Israelite, **Power Rangers** is set for a March 24th, 2017 release.

Arrow's fifth season, the Stephen Amell-starring Emerald Archer show has added **The Walking Dead**'s Chad L. Coleman as a new villain by the name of Tobias Church. Described as "an imposing gangster looking to unite the various criminal enterprises in Star City under his own singular command," this recurring character is likely to butt heads with both sides of Oliver Queen; as both the new Mayor of Star City and also as the Green Arrow. On the other side of the fence, **Chicago P.D.**'s Josh Segarra has been brought in as Adrian Chase/Vigilante, a comic book character who, as his name suggests, is a vigilante who decides to protect the streets from criminals following the death of his family. An antihero, Vigilante's methods became more and more violent over the years as he battled mental health issues. Similarly, **Mr. Robot**'s Rick Gonzalez will be playing Terry Wheeler/Wild Dog, another vigilante sort from comic book lore. Wild Dog is someone who protects the streets, armed with his trusty submachine gun and a shock-tastic pair of electric gloves, channeling the loss of his girlfriend and friends to help him clean up the dirty corners of the city. Whilst how Vigilante is used remains to be seen, it's already been confirmed that Wild Dog will be taken under the wing of Amell's Oliver Queen. In another interesting addition, Cody Rhodes is someone who has been confirmed for

a role in **Arrow**'s fifth season. Former WWE Superstar Rhodes actually has previous with Stephen Amell, with him, under the guise of Stardust, having faced Amell as a part of a tag team match at last year's SummerSlam PPV. In that bout, Amell and the high-flying Neville came out victorious over Stardust and Wade Barrett. It's expected that Rhodes, who left World Wrestling Entertainment in May, will be once again butting heads with Amell in some form. And that's not it for **Arrow** news, for Madison McLaughlin will be returning for the upcoming season. McLaughlin appeared as Evelyn Sharp, the Black Canary impersonator, towards the end of Season Four, and the character of Evelyn will be back in Star City under the mantle of Artemis. In the comic world, Artemis is the daughter of Sportsmaster and Tigress, eventually following in the villainous footsteps of her parents. In the animated **Young Justice** series, however, she was depicted as a hero with a troubled past. How she's portrayed in **Arrow** remains to be seen, but she could well end up being another troubled soul who the Master Bowman takes under his wing. **Arrow** returns to US screens on October 5th, with a UK return following shortly after that.

Where fellow DC show **The Flash** is concerned, the Grant Gustin-headlined offering has added Tom Felton to its ranks. Felton, of course, is best known to genre fans for playing Draco Malfoy in the **Harry Potter** series. In **The Flash**, he'll play a new series regular called Julian Dorn, described as being a CSI sort who'll be working alongside Gustin's Barry Allen but who also suspects that there's more to Barry than just his good guy reputation. All we know about the third season of the Scarlet Speedster-centric show so far is that it will be loosely based on the fan-favourite **Flashpoint** comic book arc. After Season Two ended with The Flash going back in time to stop his mother from dying, expect that to have huge ramifications on the present-day for Barry and his world. October 4th is the US return date for **The Flash**.

DC's Legends of Tomorrow is another of The CW's shows to bring in some new faces ahead of its new season. **Minority Report**'s Nick Zano has landed the role of Dr. Nate Heywood, better known in comic lore as Commander Steel. The final moments of the show's debut season saw the arrival of Rex Tyler, the Justice Society of America member known as Hourman. With Commander Steel now joining the fray, it seems that the JSA is certainly on the horizon for the time-travel-based series. Additionally, Maisie Richardson-Sellers, best known for a small role in **Star Wars: The Force Awakens**, is to play Vixen in **Legends**. Now Vixen has previously appeared in **Arrow** as Megalyn Echikunwoke's Mari McCabe, but Richardson-Sellers will be playing Amaya Jiwe, the grandmother of Mari. This new (or is that older?) version of Vixen will have the same powers as her granddaughter, as in she can channel the powers of animals. Whilst Commander Steel and Vixen are both confirmed, there's also a rumour that John Wesley Shipp may become a part of the series as the Jay Garrick version of The Flash following the events of **The Flash**'s second season. **DC's Legends of Tomorrow** premieres its second year on The CW on October 13th.

Having moved from CBS to The CW for its second season, **Supergirl** has made the bold move of casting Superman ahead of its new season. Following some sun-drenched shots and a few MSN Messenger conversations during its first year, the Man of Steel will appear 'proper' when **Supergirl** returns later this year. **Teen Wolf**'s Tyler Hoechlin has landed the role of the Last Son of Krypton, with him confirmed for at least two episodes of **Supergirl** with scope for further appearances down the line. Given how The CW has already confirmed that the Melissa Benoist-starring show will be part of a mega crossover event with **Arrow**, **The Flash**, and **DC's Legends of Tomorrow** in December, could it be that Hoechlin's Superman ends up teaming up with the likes of Supergirl, Green Arrow, and The Flash to battle a giant threat? Here's hoping. And in sticking with **Supergirl**'s habit of bringing in DC TV alumni (Dean Cain, Helen Slater, etc), the show has revealed that Lynda Carter will be playing the recurring part of the US President in the show's second season. Carter, of course, famously headlined the classic **Wonder Woman** series of the 1970s. **Supergirl** returns to US screens on October 10th.

In some final DC news, FOX's **Gotham** has brought in a new actress to play Poison Ivy. Maggie Geha is joining the show to replace

Clare Foley as Ivy Pepper. Ahead of the show's third season, it seems that Ivy is set to undergo a change that will push her towards her villainous destiny. As the series itself puts it, *"Following an encounter with a monster from Indian Hill, Ivy Pepper finds herself reborn and one step closer to the DC villain she is destined to become: Poison Ivy. Now a 19-year-old woman who's harnessed the full power of her charms, she sets her sights on Bruce Wayne."* **Gotham** will make its US return on September 19th. AP

ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY

Following the disheartening reports of reshoots and such last month, we have had some better news, with the confirmation that James Earl Jones will once more be returning to lend his iconic vocals to Darth Vader, plus a little more about the Sith Lord's involvement in the story.

Speaking about Vader's presence, Lucasfilm's Kathleen Kennedy explained, *"He will be in the movie sparingly, but at a key, strategic moment he's going to loom large."*

It was also revealed that numerous actors will take turns in actually inhabiting the legendary Vader suit, although no mention was made of any sort of return for Hayden Christensen (nor Dave Prowse!). Kennedy continued, *"Within the Rebellion, it's not commonly spoken about [Vader's ominous presence]. Within the Empire, there is the culture of knowing of the existence of Darth Vader. There's definitely an underlying feeling that there is a power – a dark power – available to the Empire and that if you overstep your mark, you will suffer the consequences."*

Kennedy also mentioned that the standalone spin-off movies may not have the traditional **Star Wars** opening crawl. While not officially decided upon yet, she said they are intentionally diverging from the style and flourishes of the 'saga' entries. So that'll be no fancy screen wipe transitions, then.

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story is currently set for a December 16th release.

horrorchannel

A round-up of what not to miss this month on Horror Channel...

JULY 27TH - 2001 MANIACS: FIELD OF SCREAMS (2010)

The sequel to 2005's remake **2001 Maniacs** has the bloodthirsty residents of Pleasant Valley go out on the road with a carnival to find some new victims for their annual Guts N' Glory Jubilee. Bill Moseley takes the spotlight this time for more fun and gore.

+++

AUGUST 3RD - THE MAN WHO HAUNTED HIMSELF (1970)

Roger Moore plays a dual role in this superior shocker. After crashing his car, a city worker dies briefly while in surgery. When he recovers, he discovers another version of himself who seems to be living a more salacious lifestyle.

+++

AUGUST 8TH - DEADHEADS (2012)

A bizarre but fun mix of zombie movie and a buddy/road trip flick. Not quite in the Shaun of the Dead territory, but it's harmless enough and actually has a heart (even if it isn't beating).

+++

AUGUST 18TH - COMMUNITY (2012)

Tense, terrifying, and brutal, **Community** follows a young film student as she attempts to interview residents of a run-down housing estate. Unfortunately for her (and her cameraman friend), the locals are addicted to a new strain of drug that gives them horrific traits and urges.

+++

There's a chance to catch the brilliant **Highlander** TV series starring Adrian Paul as Duncan MacLeod, the cousin of Christopher Lambert's Connor, who makes an impassioned appearance in the first episode. Duncan is brought into 'The Game', where good versus evil when immortals fight for the 'Quickening' (which involves lopping off your opponents head).

Horror Channel is available on SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138 and TalkTalk 487.



KINGSMAN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE

He's the Juggernaut, bitch... or he was, but now Vinnie Jones has revealed that he's joined Matthew Vaughn's **Kingsman: The Golden Circle**, the hotly-anticipated sequel to the brilliant **Kingsman: The Secret Service**. His role in the sequel is currently unknown. The footballer-turned-actor has previously worked with Vaughn on **Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels** and **Snatch**, both directed by Guy Ritchie and produced by Vaughn. Jones was also cast as Juggernaut in **X-Men: The Last Stand** when Vaughn was still on board to direct that film before he ultimately departed the project.

The **Kingsman** sequel features Taron Egerton as Eggsy, Mark Strong as Merlin, Halle Berry as the Head of the CIA, Pedro Pascal as Jack Daniels, and Julianne Moore as the film's 'big bad'. There's also unknown roles for the likes of Channing Tatum, Sir Elton John, Jeff Bridges, and Edward Holcroft.

At present, **Kingsman: The Golden Circle** is set for a June 16th, 2017 release. AP

PACIFIC RIM: MAELSTROM

For those eagerly awaiting the **Pacific Rim** sequel, we've some good news. Not only has the film finally been given a release date, but it looks as if it could be getting another big-name addition to its cast. You'll remember that **Pacific Rim 2** (now entitled **Pacific Rim: Maelstrom**) was initially announced for April 2017 before being pushed back to August 2017 before then being removed from the release calendar altogether. Well now comes word that Universal Pictures and Legendary Entertainment will be releasing the sequel on February 23rd, 2018.

Word has it that Scott Eastwood is in early talks for one of the lead roles in the film. As well as being the son of that Clint fella, Eastwood is likely best known to audiences for **The Longest Ride**, and he'll soon be seen in David Ayer's **Suicide Squad** when that arrives in August. At present, the only confirmed cast member for **Pacific Rim: Maelstrom** is **Star Wars: The Force Awakens'** John Boyega, who is playing the son of Idris Elba's Stacker Pentecost from the first film.

This sequel will be directed by Steven S. DeKnight, who has won a whole host of favour with genre fans for his work on the fantastic **Marvel's Daredevil**. The original movie's director Guillermo del Toro will produce alongside Thomas Tull, Mary Parent, Jon Jashni, Femi Oguns, as well as Boyega.

Production on **Pacific Rim: Maelstrom** is expected to start before the end of the year. AP

AND FINALLY...

Fans of the **Underworld** series will have even longer to wait for the next instalment as Screen Gems and Lakeshore Entertainment have put back **Underworld: Blood Wars** from its original October 14th date to January 3rd, 2017. The fifth entry in the series is directed by Anna Foerster and once again stars Kate Beckinsale.

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After being left off the initial cast list, it appears Noomi Rapace's Elizabeth Shaw will indeed be returning for Ridley Scott's **Alien: Covenant**, his follow-up to **Prometheus**. How big her role in the film will be is unsure, so we'll have to wait until the film's August 4th, 2017 release date.

TTC 427 stories by Martin Unsworth, Andrew Pollard. Edited by Martin Unsworth

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SUICIDAL TENDENCIES



WHILST ZACK SNYDER'S BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE INTRODUCED MANY A NEW FACE TO WARNER BROTHERS' DC CINEMATIC UNIVERSE THAT BEGAN WITH SNYDER'S MAN OF STEEL, A WHOLE HOST OF NEFARIOUS SORTS ARE GETTING SET TO MAKE THEIR BIG SCREEN BOW WITH DAVID AYER'S SUICIDE SQUAD. AS THE VILLAIN-CENTRIC EFFORT READIES ITSELF FOR RELEASE, LET US GET YOU UP TO SPEED WITH WHAT TO EXPECT AS SOME OF DC'S MOST UNIQUE ROGUES AND RASCALS AIM TO CAUSE CARNAGE, CHAOS, AND CALAMITY AMONGST THE DCCU.

Roll Call

Also known as Task Force X, the Suicide Squad have been around as far back as 1959, with them given a rejuvenation and facelift by John Ostrander in 1987. Without trying to tie this article too much to the team's comic book incarnation – those particular origins are covered on page 18 – it's time to branch out and see what Ayer's movie is all about.

Starting with David Ayer himself, this is a man with a mighty impressive résumé and somebody who brings instant credibility to this risky project. Having helmed the likes of *End of Watch*, *Sabotage*, and *Fury*, Ayer has made a name for himself in all the right ways. But still, what is a great director without something juicy and interesting to sink their teeth into. On that front, Ayer has developed the screenplay himself, which should hopefully bold well for this exploration into villainy. And villainy is certainly what's afoot when it comes to the Suicide Squad in any medium. This time out, the team's an excessive one and one filled with some familiar and not-so-familiar names when it comes to the mass audience.

As depicted in all of the promotional material surrounding *Suicide Squad*, certain players are more key than others. Front-and-centre – and also set to headline a future all-female DC-based flick – is Margot Robbie as Dr. Harleen Quinzel, aka Harley Quinn, the main squeeze of her puddin', the Joker. Then there's Mr J. himself, the Harlequin of Hate, the

**SUICIDE
SQUAD**
PREVIEW

by Andrew Pollard



Clown Prince of Crime, this time played by Jared Leto. Rounding out the main players of the film, at least from the promo work we've seen to date, is Will Smith as Floyd Lawton, aka Deadshot. In fairness, many have taken umbrage with Smith as Deadshot, largely down to the fact that the Fresh Prince is one of those guys, much like someone like a Johnny Depp, who often take over a role too much and just project far too much of themselves into every person they play. Regardless, Smith, Robbie, and Leto are just the tip of the iceberg, for *Suicide Squad* will introduce audiences to a glutton of B, C, and D-list level villains... but we all know that the majority of eyes are going to be focused on Leto's Mr. J.

The Plot Thickens

If we're honest, it has to be said that the plot of *Suicide Squad* is being kept well, well, well under many a tight lip. From what we can gauge though, Leto's Joker isn't actually a part of the Suicide Squad itself, instead serving as a secondary villain of the piece. That then throws up a couple of questions in itself: err, you've still not explained the Suicide Squad, and who's the main villain then? Well easy there, campers, for we're getting to that. The Suicide Squad are a group of DC bad guy put together by Amanda Waller to carry out the serious jobs that no one else will do. Essentially, because they're no-good scamps, that means they're expendable. If a mission goes tits up or if they decide to not cooperate, then 'Boom!' up they go in a cloud of smoke and ash as an explosive located in their system is detonated by Waller or one of her hired help. If only the producers behind Big Brother had thought of such an effective way of elimination, maybe the world would be a far better place.

There's that other question we touched upon there, though. As in the main villain of the piece. Despite being ominously close to release, it's still yet to be confirmed by Warner Brothers or DC just who exactly the 'big bad' of the film (a film full of 'big bads' in their own right) will be. Either way, all indications seem to point towards Cara Delevingne's Enchantress. Often portrayed as an anti-hero of sorts, like a good portion of any past and present



DAVID AYER



[On the mission statement of the *Suicide Squad* movie]

"It's all about canon... it's all about being faithful to the source material. You know what you want. You're going to get it."

[On what to expect...]

"All this good vs evil shit is played out now, it's about bad vs evil."

[On using real-life gangsters off Instagram as the inspiration of *the Joker*]

"A lot of it has to do with creating a character with some kind of history and footprint in our world. And not have this sacrosanct being outside of our continuum, our reality. If a guy like him really existed today, where would he come from? How would he do business?"

[On appealing to different audiences]

"Well the film has to work on two levels, it's gotta work for the people that know and love the comics and it's gotta work for the people that know nothing about the comics, and I think it's gonna work for both. I dug deep in this and really researched the canon, pulled storylines from a lot of different sources, characters from a lot of different sources, and it all works together really well. But I think for someone that doesn't know any of it, it works great too. It's dense, let's just say it's really dense. There's a lot of imagery, there's a lot of nods, and there's a lot of Easter eggs."

[On the challenge of making villains appealing]

"With a good guy you automatically like them because they do the right thing, but with bad guys it's more of a creative challenge – how do you get an audience to like a villain?"

WILL SMITH



[On Director, David Ayer]

"David Ayer is the absolute truth. He's made something you're going to love."

[On bringing *Deadshot* to the big screen]

"It's a character that hasn't really been explored in cinema. I get to design it and be a part of creating the first round of *Deadshot* in the history of cinema. It's a really great opportunity to work with a really great ensemble. It was perfectly cast. It's an insane group of super actor villains."

VIOLA DAVIS



[On what to expect from *Amanda Waller*]

"She is a badass. Superman would quake in his tights."

[On the difficulties of filming]

"There were times during filming that I had heart palpitations. Not only that, but at one point, I said did I suffer from hearing loss? Why is my left ear pounding?"

[On the cast]

"Every single person in it gets to be completely insane. They're all bad guys. Amanda Waller is a bad guy. We're not nice."

[On the gift from *Jared Leto*]

"We all got a box of bullets from Jared. That was a little worrisome."

Suicide Squad members, Enchantress is a magical being who is up there with some of the most powerful in the DC realm depending on who's on writing duties. The thing with the Enchantress, or simply June Moone as she's known to her friends, is she doesn't always mean to be a bad guy. In fact, at times she's depicted as someone doing her best to battle the darkness that clouds her soul. Added to that, her earlier days saw her become more lost, confused and demented as she used her powers, leading to an ever-expanding pattern of insanity for poor June. So yeah, that's Enchantress in a nutshell, but she's the target of the titular Task Force X. What about those who are on her tail?

Supporting Players

Suicide Squad will expand the DCCU massively. If you look at the cast, there are literally twenty characters or more from the lore of DC Comics. *Batman v Superman* brought Batman, Wonder Woman, The Flash, Aquaman, Cyborg, Lex Luthor, Doomsday, and Alfred into the world inhabited by Superman and Lois Lane in *Man of Steel*, but *Suicide Squad* is going even further in broadening the horizons of the DCCU, delivering more villains than the Dark Knight could shake a Batarang at. We've already touched on the big hitters of the film – Enchantress, the supposed main villain of the film and the primary target of Task Force X; Harley Quinn, the Joker's blinkered other half who has a penchant for torture and fun 'n' games; *Deadshot*, one of the very best assassins in the DC world; and the Joker, the legendary and maniacal villain who really does need no introduction – but there's a massive roster of supporting characters where Ayer's movie is concerned.

Whilst The CW's DC realm has introduced many longstanding favourites to



audiences – did anyone say Deathstroke and King Shark?! – it's now the turn of the DCCU to see what it can do with some of the supposed lesser players at its disposal. Even though she may be relatively unknown to some, Viola Davis' Amanda Waller is one of the most determined and powerful non-superpowered characters out there, with her essentially acting as the boss of the Suicide Squad. Who puts the ragtag team together, organises their missions, and terminates team members if needed? Why, that'd be The Wall. In the comic book world, Waller has often butted head with the Justice League and pretty much all of its members, whilst she also heads up the A.R.G.U.S. organisation. And with Waller pulling the strings from afar, more hands-on with Task Force X will be Rick Flag, played by Joel Kinnaman. It was a role that was originally Tom Hardy's before the *Mad Max* star departed the project in the early stages, leaving Kinnaman to take over as the military officer who will be on the ground and marshalling the Suicide Squad troops throughout their missions.

As for the rest of the crew, there's our boss man's all-time favourite actor (sorry, Mike), Jai Courtney, tackling the role of Boomerang, a character straight out of the comic books even if he's apparently no longer a Captain. Courtney himself has talked about how director Ayer told him to 'find his inner shitbag' for the gig, so expect the character to be a complete asshat as he throws his many variations of boomerangs around. Another joining the titular team is El Diablo, played by *Hostel*'s Jay Hernandez. An LA gangbanger with the ability to manipulate fire, this take on the rogue will see him positioned as a more reluctant villain than some of those who he surrounds himself with. One of those who *does* live for the death and destruction that being a part of the Suicide Squad so often brings, however, is Batman villain, Killer Croc. In



JOEL KINNAMAN

[On team building]

"We actually had a month of rehearsals. We were all in one room, rehearsing the script, improvising, and that puts everybody in an insecure and vulnerable position. You feel like everybody is feeling the same things, and you overcome it together."

JARED LETO

[On playing the Joker]

"It was a role of a lifetime. Really, it was an incredible honour to be asked to play the part."

[On what audiences can expect from the film]

"You can anticipate a lot of chaos and a hell of a lot of fun. And, I think, something completely different than other movies in the genre."

[On tackling The Joker]

"It was an incredible honor to be asked to play the part. Look, there have been so many incredible performances of the Joker over the years. Then there's the wonderful artists that have drawn this character and the writers that have written the Joker for 75 years and more through television and film and animated projects. I found it a real honor to be asked to continue the tradition. I'm so grateful that I had the chance, that's my honest answer and my thoughts on it."

MARGOT ROBBIE

[On Jared Leto's Joker]

"Sometimes it can be awkward, sometimes it can be terrifying, most of the time it's just funny. I'm trying not to laugh, because he says such hilarious things. Jared's really funny, and terrifying, and just nuts. Absolutely nuts. It's really interesting to work with someone so method, because I haven't worked with someone doing that before."

[On Harley Quinn's role in the Suicide Squad]

"She's definitely one of the more unpredictable members of the squad. She also used to be a psychiatrist so she has an extensive knowledge of mental illnesses and how to manipulate people. I'm sorry, well, she has a lot of knowledge on how to profile people, pick their triggers, and as Harley Quinn she kind of utilises that to just manipulate people and mess with them. And she definitely does that with the squad. She's always picking someone to be dissecting and playing off and messing with."

that role is *Thor: The Dark World*'s Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje, with the former Algrim the Strong and Kurse to play the walking reptilian cannibal. And sticking with the idea of walking, talking animal-esque sorts, Raymond Olubawale will be turning up in two roles; one as a generic goon-for-hire, the other as fan-favourite bad guy, King Shark. The humanoid shark has had many a comic book tangle with the likes of Aquaman, The Flash, and Superboy; seeing him come to life here could well be the highlight of *Suicide Squad* for many a longtime DC fan.

Making up the rest of Task Force X, there's Karen Fukuhara as hero-cum-anti-hero Katana, the, err, katana-wielding badass who has previously been adapted by The CW in *Arrow* as an aide to Stephen Amell's Oliver Queen. In *Suicide Squad*, Katana and her ever-trusty Soultaker blade will be tasked with serving as a bodyguard of sorts for Rick Flag during his interactions with the Squad. One of those who she will be protecting Flag from is Adam Beach's Slipknot. No, he's nothing to do with *that* band, instead acting as a master of indestructible ropes. Yep, the character is often as dull as he sounds, and if we were placing bets on which member of the *Suicide Squad* was the most likely to bite the bullet early on in the film, we'd be betting the mortgage on Slipknot. In other small, supporting roles, there's rapper-turned-actor Common – himself once heavily tipped to play the John Stewart Green Lantern in a DC movie – as a mystery villain dubbed Monster T (apparently no relation to Messrs. Mr or Ice). It's believed that this character could well be a take on the comic book Tattooed Man, and he'll definitely be in cahoots with Leto's Joker. Jim Parrack is another who'll be working with Mr. J, playing a character called Jonny Frost. Those with a keen eye for the comic book world will instantly recognise that name as belonging to somebody who ends up running afoul of the Joker just a tad... meaning Jonny may be used as collateral damage to highlight the



Clown Prince of Crime's dark edge.

As for others set to make an appearance, both Ike Barinholtz and Scott Eastwood have mystery roles in *Suicide Squad*. For Barinholtz, speculation ranges from Hugo Strange to Deathstroke to the Riddler when it comes to who he could be playing. Similarly, speculation is rampant when it comes to what part Eastwood has to play in the film, with he another rumoured to possibly be playing the baddest of baddest assassins, Slade Wilson, aka Deathstroke. Interestingly, more buzz doing the rounds when it comes to Eastwood's role is that he could actually be playing Dick Grayson, aka Nightwing. The talented son of that Clint fella would be a fantastic choice as either Slade or Dick, but we'll have to wait and see just what his role is when *Suicide Squad* hits cinemas. But sticking with the Bat family, it's been long-confirmed that Dick's mentor and adoptive father, the Caped Crusader himself, will be a part of *Suicide Squad*. Ben Affleck's Batman will get to tangle with Jared Leto's Joker, and he could also be looking to put a stop to the Suicide Squad as a whole, especially with it believed that the World's Greatest Detective will be the one responsible for having locked up all of film's rogues in the first place.

Whilst *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* disappointed many, we can only hope that David Ayer's *Suicide Squad* ups the ante and helps to establish some much-needed credibility to Warner Brothers' DC Cinematic Universe. With a roster brimming with potential and a director capable of delivering something special, all eyes are firmly on *Suicide Squad*. Here's hoping that these bad guys make for good viewing.

SUICIDE SQUAD blasts into UK cinemas on August 5th.



**SUICIDE
SQUAD**



ROGUE'S GALLERY



BY CHRIS HAYDON

As we prepare for the onslaught of DC's villainous super-team, let's find out who they actually are and where they came from...

Surrounded by miles of treacherous swampland in Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana resides one dastardly location, a place that houses the most corrupt, malicious and clinically insane residents of all boroughs in the DC Comics universe. No, it is not Arkham Asylum, rather Belle Reve Federal Penitentiary: an ultra-prison for supervillains and metahumans alike.

So it seems somewhat ironic that so many of these warped inmates are frequently out on the loose throughout Gotham, Starling City, Smallville, Metropolis, and Central City, terrorising the innocent in their wake. But Belle Reve is no ordinary lockup, and its residents are under no ordinary judicial practice.

Instead, it serves as the base for the Suicide Squad (or Task Force X as some may recall), an unorthodox antihero 'strike team' composed of these incarcerated foes. Devised by Amanda Waller - herself a former inmate - the team operates under a work release program that sees them undertake high-risk, black-ops missions in exchange for commuted prison sentences.

The Suicide Squad first debuted in *The Brave and the Bold* #25 in 1959 and have been as evolutionary as the ensemble



AMANDA WALLER



RICK FLAGG

heroes across the DC Universe. Now in 2016, director David Ayer is bringing the team to the silver screen in the self-titled blockbuster starring Margot Robbie, Jared Leto, Joel Kinnaman, Will Smith, Jai Courtney, Viola Davis, Cara Delevingne, Jay Hernandez, Scott Eastwood, and Karen Fukuhara, but who exactly are the members and what are their origins?

To understand the menace and the muscle, you first must evaluate the brain. Despite lacking any superpowers or special abilities, Amanda Waller is one of the most progressive and pivotal figures in all of DC lore. Portrayed by Viola Davis in the upcoming film, the character has seen many transitions since her inception; from panel to screen and back again. She has appeared in live-action shows *Smallville* and *Arrow*, animated series *Young Justice* and feature film *Green Lantern*, as well as a number of video games.

Waller is a ruthless, high-ranking government official who uses her intelligence, guile, and intimidation to advance her career and achieve her goals. Operating in the name of 'national security', she oversees an assortment of specialist research which examines those with superpowers such as A.R.G.U.S. (Advanced Research Group Uniting Super-Humans), Checkmate and, of course, the Suicide Squad.

Since the cell doors at Belle Reve first opened, a number of different villains

have taken up occupation, but Waller has always been the directorial driving force behind the fraternity. However, whilst she may control the operations from the confines of an office - as well as engaging rather nasty devices that cause maiming or death should any of the team attempt to disband during a mission - she also needs a reliable field leader, someone used to the harsh horrors of warfare.

That's where Rick Flag comes in. A multi-generational presence - father, son, and grandson across the DCU - he is portrayed by Joel Kinnaman in Ayer's film. Flag Sr. led the original Suicide Squadron during World War II. Following his first mission, he was left as the lone survivor. A lethal mercenary committed to the cause despite such losses, Flag devised Task Force X and began recruiting. Task Force X served under two key units: 'Argent' - a military team lead by 'Control' - and the 'Suicide Squad' - a civilian unit dealing with masked villains and the like.

Flag Jr. was later tapped by the government to lead the new Suicide Squad devised by Waller, a role he reluctantly assumed, but remained committed to the program through its many transitions. Interestingly, however, Flag is absent from the revamped roster that featured in *New Suicide Squad* in 2014 - the latest comic collection prior to the new movie. In fact, the vast majority of team members in the New 52 adaptation do not feature in Ayer's film. His Suicide Squad largely consists of

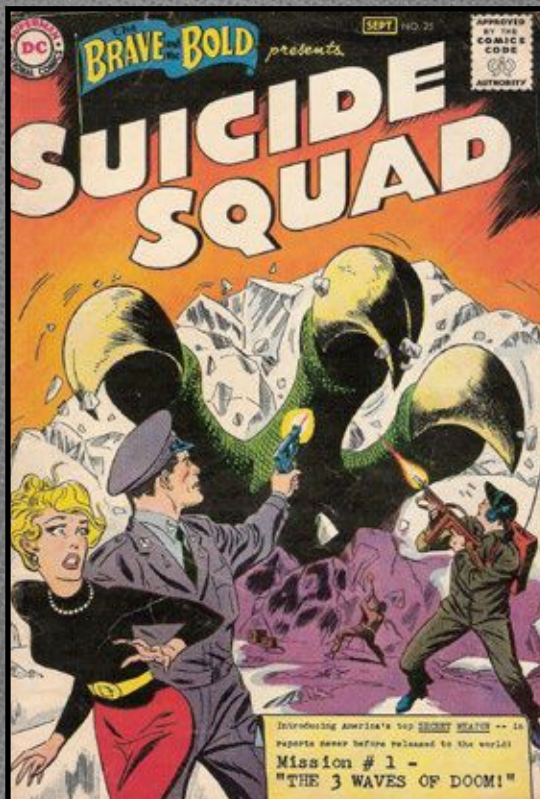
Batman villains, whilst the comics have a more even spread across the Universe.

Some of those who feature include Joker's Daughter/Duela Dent, Reverse-Flash/Daniel West, Black Manta, Cheetah, Parasite, and even Deathstroke/Slade Wilson - the primary villain of *The CW's Arrow Season Two*.

A member who features as frequently as Flag and appears on screen in August, however, is Deadshot. Played by Will Smith, Floyd Lawton is one of the most renowned supervillains and antiheroes in the DCU and has served as an assailant for a number of heroes including Batman, Green Arrow, The Flash and Superman. A staple member of both the Suicide Squad and the Secret Six, Deadshot is the world's most skilled and accurate marksman and operates largely as an assassin for hire.

The character has been a regular face throughout the first two seasons of *Arrow* - as part of both A.R.G.U.S. and the Suicide Squad, as well as a regular foe for Oliver Queen and ally John Diggle, who desperately seeks revenge for the murder of his beloved brother.

In Ayer's adaptation, Deadshot finds a particularly unstable friend in Harley Quinn. Depicted by Margot Robbie, she is one of the most recognisable comic book villains in history and serves as a major fan favourite. A former psychiatrist at Arkham Asylum, Dr. Harleen Quinzel



is one of the primary foes of Batman and will feature alongside her long-serving accomplice and lover in the movie.

A crazed supervillain with an insatiable bloodlust, she is one of the Suicide Squad's most manipulative members, using her scathing wit and seductiveness to consume and control. Despite being one of the DCU's most prestigious faces, this will be the very first time Harley Quinn has featured in a live-action motion picture. A number of her most trusted companions - including Poison Ivy and Power Girl - have featured in previous Suicide Squad renditions, whilst her most associated partner has never been featured with the team... until now.

Unquestionably, the most iconic supervillain in not only the DCU, but comic book history is the Joker; Batman's arch nemesis and the most psychotic, demonic presence in Arkham and the entirety of Gotham. We all know the character's origins, we all know his poetic madness, but his addition to Ayer's film - a role Jared Leto will occupy - is something a little more unusual.

Technically, the Joker is not a member of the Suicide Squad. He is an integral part of fellow DC villain ensemble the Injustice League, but he is not a resident of Belle Reve, nor is he under Waller's command. Instead, he operates internally from his detain in Arkham, the place where young and impressionable Harleen first meets her future beau. He shows zero restraint and fails to coherently work alongside fellow

villains such as Two-Face and the Penguin, even though their target - Batman - remains the mutual goal.

Like Harley Quinn, the Joker is so wildly unhinged and chaotic that their partnership can only be described as a beautiful disaster. Founded upon malicious psychological games, relentless madness and depravity, and the unquenchable thirst to be the kingpins of the criminal underworld, they beat to a separate drum and have done throughout the entire legacy of DC Comics. It'll be extremely interesting to see how their relationship escalates under the restraint of the upcoming movie.

Another familiar face for the Dark Knight - and certainly audiences connected to the *Batman: Arkham* video game franchise - is Killer Croc. The infamous criminal is portrayed by Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje in the movie, and is set to be as brazen and brutal as ever. Real name Waylon Jones, Killer Croc suffers from an extremely rare genetic condition which gives him a crocodilian appearance, as well as dangerous and primal animal instincts.

A towering presence and essentially anthropomorphic, Killer Croc is a cannibal who regularly feasts on his many victims. In the New 52 timeline, the character is seen in Roy Harper/Arsenal's memories, linking him to the Green Arrow storyline as well as the Caped Crusader.

Outside of Batman's sphere, but who

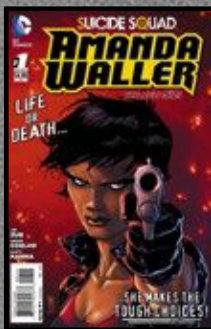
regularly earns his stripes with the team, is Captain Boomerang, sworn enemy of Barry Allen/The Flash. Interpreted by Jai Courtney in the film, George 'Digger' Harkness is a gruelling presence and regularly referred to as a 'bogan' - an Australian and New Zealand slang term for the self-deprecating lower class. Vulgar, racist and extremely unpredictable, he is a supervillain who operates on a similar level to Deadshot; where the money is, he goes.

The weapon of choice is, of course, boomerangs, but highly equipped and deadly ones, which are utilised with dangerous gizmos. His controversial views and opinions have caused many rifts in the Suicide Squad, with some members thinking he is even too cruel for involvement, and that's saying something. One pivotal member who is absent from Ayer's movie is Bronze Tiger, who features in The CW's adaptation of the crew. Captain Boomerang regularly refers to him as an 'abbo', which causes considerable friction.

One character who has worn many faces throughout his time in the DCU is El Diablo. Across three generations - from 1970 to today - he has had three identities: Lazarus Lane, Rafael Sandoval, and Chato Santana. The third rendition is the one that appears in the movie and is played by Jay Hernandez. Santana is a former Los Angeles gang member who once honed a world of corruption, gun crime, and drug money. However, following a bitter incident which left him hospitalised, he awoke to the



DEADSHOT



HARLEY QUINN



THE JOKER



KILLER CROC



CAPTAIN BOOMERANG



EL DIABLO

mysterious power of summoning flames.

Not formally introduced into the Suicide Squad until the New 52, he is one of three somewhat 'newer' or less recognised members of the team who make up the cinematic team. In addition, Cara Delevingne will be bringing Enchantress to the big screen for the very first time in the movie, and it'll be the first time since *Suicide Squad Volume 1* (1987 - 1992) that the character has been affiliated with the team.

A nemesis for Green Lantern and Supergirl, June Moone is a powerful sorceress who has the ability to manipulate magical energy for a vast assortment of effects. Healing, teleportation, altering state, and presence; she is an incredibly powerful witch. In the movie, she is technically not a traditional member of the Suicide Squad, but Waller is intrigued by her great skill carved from ancient evil forces.

Also on the fringes of the team is Katana, an expert martial artist and swordswoman. Played by Karen Fukuhara, she serves as Rick Flag's bodyguard in a voluntary role. As she is not a criminal, nor a resident of Belle Reve, she is not implanted with the micro-bomb chip like her fellow members. Wielding the mystical and all-powerful blade known as 'Soulmaker', Katana is able to snatch the spirits of her victims by slicing through them with precision and mercilessness.

There is no denying that the Suicide Squad are an unconventional bunch: violent, depraved, self-obsessed, and untrustworthy. They are not your typical idea of government protection, nor would you be best pleased if they were assigned to assist your needs. They are dubbed the Worst Heroes Ever, but that is what makes them so special. Every reckless act, every morally ambiguous decision and every blind eye turned to lawfulness makes for truly compelling reading, and consequently filmmaking. David Ayer's movie is certain to be a total blast; we just hope everyone can withstand the impact...



SUICIDE SQUAD opens in UK cinemas in IMAX 3D on August 5th.



THE ENCHANTRESS



KATANA

SUICIDE SQUAD





Whilst DC's famed Suicide Squad have yet to be given their own TV show of any form, that's not to say that their presence hasn't been felt in the realm of television. Appearances in various animated DC efforts is one thing, but the Squad have really made their mark in some of The CW's more notable live-action superhero shows of recent years, and it's those shows that we're going to explore further here.

FIRST DRAFT

Bringing Task Force X to a live-action show is certainly a challenging one, but it's something that's been handled rather well at the times that The CW decided upon bringing this ragtag bunch of rogues to the small screen. Sure, with animated shows, all problematic factors are taken away when it comes to what you can actually do with the team. Fancy using a giant humanoid shark? No problem. Want to have a superpowered being who can manipulate ice? Easy. But making such characters work in a live-action setting is a different matter. In fairness, *The Flash* has used both King Shark and Killer Frost in its recent second season, and both looked fantastic in how they were depicted, but that's not to say that

this wasn't a tricky process in terms of the SFX/CGI work needed and the cost involved. As such, live-action superheroes and supervillains may have to be held off for certain special occasions or simply have their elaborate comic book appearance tweaked in order to make them a realistic addition to any show that they turn up in.

To go back to their first live-action appearance, the Suicide Squad's CW debut came back in *Smallville*, the Tom Welling-starring Superman-in-waiting show that ran for ten seasons up until 2011. They'd get namedropped in Season Nine when Pam Grier's Amanda Waller executed poor Cameron Mahkent (also essentially known as Icicle Jr.) and 'welcomed' him to the Suicide Squad. The team themselves wouldn't actually appear until the following season, however, with them being portrayed as an offshoot of the nefarious Checkmate group. As ever, Task Force X were used when normal goons-for-hire weren't up to the job at hand. The Suicide Squad was led by Ted Whittall's Rick Flag but was presumed dead after Zod wiped out the entire Checkmate organisation and its sub-teams. That would prove a false presumption, though, and Flag

would return with a new Suicide Squad team to take down and kidnap the show's version of Green Arrow (played by Justin Hartley, with fans in uproar when some Stephen Amell fella later nabbed the Emerald Archer gig for a shown named *Arrow*...). This was at a time when *Smallville* was constructing its take on the Justice League, and the Suicide Squad were tasked with bringing down Oliver Queen's chums; Bradley Stryker as master assassin Deadshot had Clark Kent in his sights, Jessica Parker Kennedy as the explosive Plastique had Hawkman dead to rights, and Elias Toufexis as the teleporting Warp later joined the group to take out General Sam Lane. As ever with Task Force X, the line between good and bad was a little blurred in *Smallville*, and one moment in time saw the group actually taking orders from none other than fanboy crush of many Chloe Sullivan (the ever-adorable Allison Mack). By the time the brief run of the show's Suicide Squad came to an end, Rick Flag and Deadshot had actually joined with Chloe to help rescue Clark and his Justice League cohorts from the grips of the Vigilante Registration Agency, the corrupt organisation headed up by Slade Wilson that was experimenting on heroes in order to understand and manipulate their powers.

VILLAINS IN (LIVE) ACTION

BY ANDREW POLLARD



EVEN IF YOU'VE NOT READ THE COMICS, YOU MAY HAVE ALREADY COME ACROSS THE SUICIDE SQUAD VIA THE SMALL SCREEN INCARNATIONS SEEN ON THE SUCCESSFUL SHOWS BROUGHT TO US BY THE CW, AS WE FIND OUT...



SECOND SQUADRON

Smallville may have introduced audiences to a live-action Suicide Squad, but it was *Arrow* that well and truly upped the ante as to what you could do with Task Force X. Whereas *Smallville* introduced the team as a 'whole', *Arrow* took the different route of introducing villains throughout its first year or so, then having them eventually become part of Amanda Waller's (Cynthia Addai-Robinson) Suicide Squad in the show's second season. By this point in time, you'd already seen many of these characters fleshed out, particularly Michael Rowe's brilliant Floyd Lawton/Deadshot, and were fully aware of just what they were capable of. In fact, it was Lawton who coined the team's infamous name, proclaiming "Give me a break, this ain't no task force. Let's call it like it is. Welcome to the Suicide Squad." Joining Deadshot in the team were already-introduced rogues Shrapnel (Sean Maher) and Bronze Tiger (Michael Jai White). But giving the group a more heroic balance was the inclusion of John Diggle (David Ramsey) and his wife-turned-ex-wife-turned-wife Lyla Michaels (Audrey Marie Anderson). Dig, Oliver Queen's right-hand man since *Arrow*'s opening episodes, and his other half were there to keep the Suicide Squad

in check, although that still didn't stop one of their number going rogue (err, if that is the right term for a rogue going rogue?). When the foolhardy Shrapnel makes the mistake of abandoning his mission, Waller thinks nothing of detonating the explosive that is embedded in his spine. That wasn't the only problem for this version of Task Force X, though, for there was the trigger-temper dynamic between Diggle and Deadshot, with it having been revealed that it was Deadshot who'd killed Diggle's brother Andy (of course, viewers of *Arrow*'s recent fourth season will be well aware that there's been a slightly major development on that front). Now, whilst the actual Squad themselves were fun to watch, largely because their characters had been well established by the time the team was put together, *Arrow* gave fans a moment that had any and all fanboys grinning from ear-to-ear like a Joker victim. Yes, they gave a super brief tease of none other than Harley Quinn. Given how Harleen has been a staple of the modern comic book Suicide Squad line-up, fans got tight in the pants at the simple sight of the back of a blonde female (officially listed in the credits as simply 'Deranged Female') locked up in an A.R.G.U.S. cell and given one line of dialogue. What made this moment even greater was that the line itself – "Do you cuties need some counseling? I'm a

trained therapist." – was delivered by the vocals of the iconic Tara Strong, the actress responsible for handling Harley in animated and video game form.

Whilst Diggle would use the Suicide Squad to assist Team Arrow in taking down the threat of Slade Wilson's mirakuru-driven army in the Season Two finale, the motley crew would continue after that. After the Green Arrow successfully took down the threat of the misguided Cupid (Amy Gumenick), the Emerald Archer hands her over to Amanda Waller to use as part of her Task Force X. Following that, the début of Digger Harkness (Nick Tarabay), aka Captain Boomerang, in the first part of the now-annual *Arrow/The Flash* crossover, saw him revealed to have been a former member of the Suicide Squad. Following a botched mission, Harkness was ordered to be 'terminated' by Waller, although he'd manage to escape the clutches of A.R.G.U.S. The team would resurface in the *Suicidal Tendencies* episode of *Arrow*, with Deadshot sacrificing himself to save Diggle, Lyla, and a kidnapped senator. That was essentially the last we'd see of the live-action CW Suicide Squad team, but that's not to say there were no plans for more to come from them.





TERMINATED

Following the warm reception to Task Force X during *Arrow*, there was talk amongst The CW of giving the roguish group their own spin-off TV series. Unfortunately, that idea was eventually crushed by the news that Warner Brothers were to develop the *Suicide Squad* movie. But not only did that put the brakes on a TV show for the team, it also saw them taken out of the equation altogether. Following the news of a big screen flick for the villains, The CW was forced to take the steps of actually killing off characters who may be in line for appearing in Warner's DC Cinematic Universe. As mentioned, Deadshot was killed off in *Arrow*, which was a move done purely because Will Smith was to play the character on the silver screen. Similarly, Amanda Waller had a bullet put through her skull in *Arrow*'s most recent season; a move made to kill off Cynthia Addai-Robinson's take on the Wall ahead of Viola Davis taking on the gig in the DCCU. As for that uber-teasing cameo from Harley Quinn, there was a plan at one point in time to bring the Joker's main squeeze into *Arrow* for an arc involving the show's interpretation of Arkham Asylum. But no, that was something that was halted once Margot Robbie's Harley Quinn was to be front and centre of the big screen outing

for the team. Luckily, none of the other small screen versions of those appearing in David Ayer's *Suicide Squad* – such as Captain Boomerang and Katana – were deemed big enough TV presences to kill off... for now. Given that the DCCU has been confirmed to be an entirely separate entity to The CW's DC realm – as indicated by Ezra Miller playing the big screen Flash and Grant Gustin playing the small screen incarnation – it seems ridiculous for Warner Brothers to give the orders to terminate certain TV characters based on them being used in a movie. Does that mean that the excellent *The Flash* has to be cancelled once the Scarlet Speedster's solo movie arrives? Will *Gotham* be forced to change its path once its young Bruce Wayne starts to mature and head more towards the cape and cowl? Who knows what the future has in store, but putting Task Force X to bed where TV is concerned just seems like a missed opportunity, especially given how well the TV-driven DC products of recent years have been handled.

So whilst *Suicide Squad* should prove to be one of the most successful movies of the year, let's not forget where the formidable, nefarious Task Force X got their live-action wings.



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THUNDER STRUCK

BY ED FORTUNE



DC Comics don't have the monopoly on telling stories that put the villains first. The mighty MARVEL house of ideas has its own take on a superhero team composed only of bad guys, but they didn't go down quite the same path as DC's infamous SUICIDE SQUAD.

Let's take a look at THUNDERBOLTS, an entirely different way to make bad guys look good...

Thunderbolts roared into the pages of *Incredible Hulk* back in 1997, ten years after *Suicide Squad* hit the shelves of your local comics shop. The Thunderbolts weren't initially marketed as a book about villains. The idea was that this was a new team of heroes and the fact they were actually old villains pretending to be good guys would be revealed over time.

The '90s were a perfect time for this sort of stunt. Back then, comic book heroes were incredibly exaggerated and each book was liberally peppered with huge chests, huge guns and huge

amounts of angst and overly long monologues. Everyone pretty much expected heroes to misbehave, so bad behaviour from the good guys was par for the course. This time also saw Marvel experiment with killing off some of their more iconic (but poorly selling) lines. The crossover event *Onslaught* murdered the Fantastic Four and most of the Avengers. Of course, they came back. That's how comic book heroes work. The initial Thunderbolts seemed to be an all new team of never-before-seen heroes, stepping up to fill in the gap left by the Avengers. In their initial appearance, they

looked like a new (if a little arrogant) superhero team in the same sort of vein. The brainchildren of Kurt Busiek and Mark Bagley, the idea was to keep readers guessing for a big reveal. Busiek, who's better known for his work on Superman, would return to the motif of villains turned heroes in his critically acclaimed series *Astro City*.

The team was led by the flag-wearing Citizen V, an obscure World War Two-era hero who first appeared in an issue of *Daring Mystery Comics* back in 1942. This was published by Timely Comics, the company that would evolve



into Marvel. The '40s version sported a domino mask, a handgun, and an awful lot of pluck. The '90s version of Citizen V was a lot better equipped as well as a master swordsman and tactical genius. Of course, he wasn't actually the grandson of the original Citizen V, instead, he was the criminal mastermind Baron Zemo in disguise, much to the surprise of comic fans.

The entire team was composed of members of Marvel's most obviously named villainous league, The Masters Of Evil, all pretending to be someone else. Former Spider-Man foe and Iron Man wannabe the Beetle became MACH-1. Tech-suit making weasel Fixer became a super inventor called Techno. Zemo's former henchman Goliath became the powerhouse Atlas, and part-time hippy and circus clown Screaming Mimi became the much more confident Songbird.

The original story arc saw the Thunderbolts starting to believe that they could be heroes. Zemo, being the sort of madman that he is, carried on with his plan, despite Songbird embracing the hero within and the others desperately looking for an angle. Zemo's plan for world domination may well have worked but, of course, the Avengers and

the Fantastic Four returned back from the dead - he should have expected that, really, he does live in a comic book world. Though they'd been defeated, some of the Thunderbolts remained, deciding to make a go of it as heroes, despite being wanted criminals.

The first arc only really established the idea behind Thunderbolts; not quite heroes, not quite villains. Caught between heaven and hell, doing the right thing most of the time, sometimes for the right reasons. Much like DC's Suicide Squad, the essential dynamic here is one of mistrust and change. Some of these super-powered types truly want to become good guys, others just want to survive. Others know that they are forever damned, and make a go of it anyway.

The roster has changed a lot over the year, and even established heroes have found themselves working for these grey angels. Admittedly, it's mostly been Hawkeye, who's meant to be the bad boy of the Avengers franchise anyway. One notable plot line saw the Spider Man villain Green Goblin become the Director of S.H.I.E.L.D., changing the name to H.A.M.M.E.R. Obviously, he didn't like the idea of having the Avengers running around, so he dressed

up the Thunderbolts in the old Avengers costumes and wackiness ensued, leading to the Dark Avengers storyline.

The Thunderbolts are an ongoing part of the regular Marvel roster; currently the roster of not quite bad guys includes Winter Soldier, Ghost Rider and a bright red version of the Hulk that happens to be a very confused General Ross. Marvel does tend to stick interesting characters that they aren't quite sure what to do with in the Thunderbolts, which is also very much what DC tends to do with Suicide Squad.

We are unlikely to see a Marvel Cinematic Universe version of the Thunderbolts anytime soon. The Marvel movies have an annoying habit of killing off their villains, and the films rarely bother to develop the bad guys to any extent. We have seen Zemo in action so far, but given how far Marvel likes to plan ahead, we're more likely to see the plot of Thunderbolts hidden inside an Avengers, Iron Man or Captain America movie rather than a standalone feature. Given Hawkeye's association with the Thunderbolts in the comics, if they ever give the bowman his own movie then it's likely they'll cannibalise a Thunderbolts plot for that. You never know, if *Suicide Squad* is as successful as Warner Brothers hopes, then lightning may yet strike.



STARBURST

INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

PREVIEW

AUGUST BANK HOLIDAY WEEKEND IS SHAPING UP TO BE AN AWESOME AND EXCITING GET-TOGETHER IN MANCHESTER AS STARBURST HOLDS ITS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL. WHAT WILL THAT ENTAIL? WELL, LET'S HAVE A LOOK AT SOME OF THE AMAZING THINGS WE HAVE PLANNED TO KEEP YOU ENTERTAINED AND HAVING FUN.

BY MARTIN UNSWORTH

FILM HIGHLIGHTS

While these are still be firmed up as we go to print, we have been working alongside the BFI and other great companies to bring the best in cult, sci-fi, and horror cinema and TV.

Already confirmed are:

+ Mad Max 2

Experience The Road Warrior on the big screen with insight from the wonderful Virginia Hey - the warrior woman herself! We will also have a slide show of rare behind the scenes images from the film shoot from Virginia's personal collection.

+ Licence to Kill

Legendary James Bond director John Glen has chosen his favourite 007 movie, and will be on hand to answer questions.

+ Hammer Horror: The Warner Brothers Years

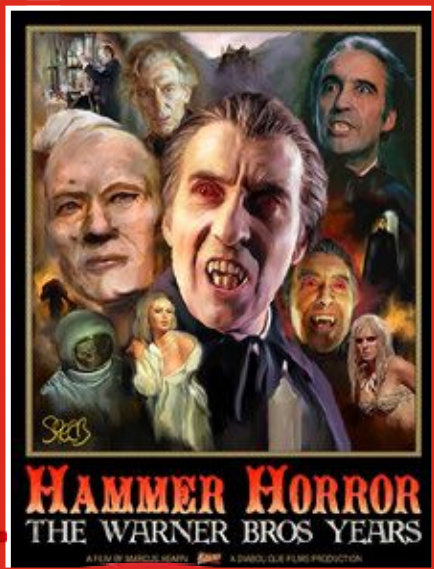
World Premiere of the brand new documentary by Hammer historian Marcus Hearn. Stars Caroline Munro and Martine Beswick will also be on hand to provide first-hand anecdotes about working with the great British studio.

+ Aliens

James Cameron's classic sequel will be presented with an introduction by production designer Peter Lamont.

+ Horror Double Bills

We're going back to the good old days when we all used to stay up late and watch back-to-back classics. Among the movies we have lined up are a brand new 2K remastered version of **Psychomania** (1971) in association with the BFI. Star Nicky Henson will be along to regale us of his memories of making the cult classic.





JOHN GLEN



CAROLINE MUNRO



MARTINE BESWICK



PETER LAMONT



STEVE PEMBERTON



TOBY WHITHOUSE

GUESTS

The STARBURST International Film Festival will be welcoming a huge array of talent from in front of and behind the camera. But this won't be a case of just lining up celebrities and having them sign like a cattle market, the guests will be taking part in numerous panels, Q & As, film introductions, and other talks as well as being available to meet and greet. Appearing this year (subject to work commitments) are:

+ John Glen

A Hollywood legend, who worked on eight James Bond films, and was director of five. Including, **For Your Eyes Only**, **Octopussy**, and **Licence To Kill**.

+ Virginia Hey

Former model-turned-actress who has appeared in several massive franchises: **Mad Max 2**, James Bond (**The Living Daylights**, helmed by fellow guest John Glen), and on TV: **Prisoner Cell Block H**, **Neighbours**, and **Home and Away**. Virginia is perhaps best known as the spiritual alien Zhaan in **Farscape**.

+ Caroline Munro

Another former model (readers of a certain vintage will remember the Lambs Navy Rum poster fondly), Caroline has appeared in Hammer films (**Captain Kronos - Vampire Hunter and Dracula A.D. 1972**), Bond (**The Spy Who Loved Me**), and cult classics such as **The Abominable Dr Phibes**, **At The Earth's Core**, **Starcrash**, and **Maniac** (1980). Caroline also starred in **The Golden Voyage of Sinbad**, which showcased the amazing effects of stop-motion genius Ray Harryhausen - someone celebrated during the weekend too.

+ Martine Beswick

Another Hammer alumni, with roles in the studio's infamous cave girl films **One Million Years B.C.** and **Slave Girls**, as well as a show stopping turn in **Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde**. Martine appeared in two Bond movies - **From Russia with Love** and **Thunderball**.

+ Peter Beale

Former Managing Director of Fox UK, Peter has worked on numerous high profile films: **Alien**, **The Rocky Horror Picture Show**, **The Omen**, **The Elephant Man**, oh - and a small movie you may have heard of called **Star Wars**. Peter is surely going to have plenty of interesting stories to tell.

+ Peter Lamont

An Academy Award-winning Production Designer, Peter worked on eighteen Bond films, as well as James Cameron's **Aliens** and the perennial classic **Chitty Chitty Bang Bang**.

+ Steve Pemberton

Writer, comedian, and screenwriter, Steve is instantly recognisable as a member of **The League of Gentlemen**. Following that show, he once again worked with Reece Shearsmith on the twisted **Psychoville** and superb anthology series **Inside No. 9**.

+ Toby Whithouse

Creator of **Being Human**, writer of some of the best **Doctor Who** episodes of recent years, Toby is going to be a fascinating and entertaining guest.

INSIDE NO. 9



SPECIAL EVENTS

+ Inside No. 9 Series Three Preview

Appearing at the festival will be Steve Pemberton, the director Graeme Harper, and series producer Adam Tandy. Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith followed up the multi-award-winning **Psychoville** with an anthology of tales of the genuinely unexpected. What goes on behind closed doors on the street where you live? **Inside No. 9** invites viewers into six very different No. 9s, where the ordinary and mundane rub shoulders with the extraordinary and macabre. The first two series of the show have gone down as must-see comedy television, with each episode being as hilariously surprising as the last. The BBC will be screening Series Three from September 2016. The STARBURST Film Festival has secured a totally exclusive screening of an episode prior to broadcast.

Series producer Adam Tandy told us, *"Inside No. 9 is back with six new films, and it is just as surprising as ever. Steve and Reece are absolute masters of the unexpected, and I'm constantly in awe of their inventiveness. We also have some truly amazing guest stars, including Keeley Hawes, Felicity Kendal, Tamzin Outhwaite, and Jason Watkins".*

+ Ray Harryhausen Lost Treasures

When Ray passed away in 2013, we lost one of the greatest, gifted, visionaries in cinema. Ray can truly be described as a legend of visual effects, having been responsible for such classics as **The 7th Voyage of Sinbad**, **Jason and the Argonauts**, **One Million Years BC**, and **Clash of the Titans**. He received an Oscar for lifetime achievement in 1992, and has been hailed as a major influence from every major figure in the world of sci-fi and fantasy. Steven Spielberg, Peter Jackson, Tim Burton, James Cameron, Guillermo del Toro, Nick Park and so many others have cited Ray as a major inspiration to their careers; George Lucas was quoted as saying *"Without Ray Harryhausen, there would likely have been no Star Wars"*. Given this impressive body of work and how the industry has seen Ray's inspirational creations and stop motion filmmaking skills, we are celebrating his work at the STARBURST Film Festival. As part of

RAY HARRYHAUSEN WITH JOHN WALSH



Saturday's Family Day, the Ray Harryhausen Foundation will be showcasing models and unseen test film footage including some from major film productions. The title of this presentation is 'The Lost Treasures' which refers to Ray's Californian garage, which turned out to be something akin to Howard Carter peering into Tutankhamun's tombs outer chamber in 1922. Apparently, Ray said that anything that was in there was 'junk'. Well maybe to him but to the rest of us it has provided great insight into the work and processes used by Ray during his lifetime of creating some astounding models and effects. Some of these 'Lost' artefacts will be showcased at the Festival. Filmmaker John Walsh will be joined by Connor Heaney, Collections Manager for our special presentation.

✦ Thunderbirds 1965

The new episodes plus Q&A with filmmaker Stephen La Rivière and David Graham (the voice of Parker, Gordon Tracy, Brains, and Kyrano in the original series). These exciting episodes are based on 3 original audio-only stories featuring the original cast which have been filmed using classic Supermarionation techniques as part of the programme's recent 50th anniversary. The stories include new recruits Parker and Lady Penelope visiting Tracy Island for the first time, a trip to Mount Everest and extreme danger in the Tower of London. Standby for 85 minutes of exclusive footage!

- **Introducing Thunderbirds**
(Directed by Justin T. Lee)
- **The Abominable Snowman**
(Stephen La Rivière)
- **The Stately Home Robberies**
(David Elliott)

✦ The Peter Beale Sessions

The former Managing Director of FOX Productions UK gives will be conducting three separate talks over the weekend. Eye-opening details from behind the scenes of the film industry are promised, as Peter has first-hand knowledge of some of the genre's greatest and most popular movies.

- **The Real Story Behind the Making of Star Wars.** Peter is the man who made the greatest space adventure of them all a reality, we will get a very rare chance to hear the inside story straight from the horse's mouth.
- **Star Wars and the Force: What it is. How to Find It** - Peter has had multiple experiences of out of body travel, intuition, and is a healer.

He will explain how the Force is linked to



eastern tradition of meditation, mysticism, enlightenment, and universal knowledge.

✦ Lights/Camera/Ego

Find out how the film industry operates and learn what each member of the team that you see in the end credits actually does.

✦ STARBURST RADIO Live Podcast

The award-winning radio show will be hosted live from one of the numerous rooms in the spacious MMU complex. Come along and watch the editors (and maybe one or two special guests) discuss the latest happenings in the world of cult entertainment. You never know, we might even provide some free Jägerwater to make up for the lack of taste and decency.

✦ Doctor Who

We are very lucky to have a number of great behind-the-scenes characters from the world of **Doctor Who**, who will be available to answer all your Time Lord-centric queries and recount numerous entertaining stories. Keep checking the website for up-to-date guest announcements and last minute additions.

✦ The STARBURST Fantasy Awards

A whole host of new movies will be screened over the weekend, and a panel of industry professionals, directors, and writers will choose the recipients of what will be one of the most coveted trophies



in the UK. With our leaning to celebrate independent cinema, STARBURST is pleased to acknowledge the hard work and ingenuity that goes into filmmaking, and the ceremony will provide a fitting end to the festival before leading to what promises to be a very messy after show party.

✦ All the main STARBURST team will be attending as well as plenty of the writers of your favourite columns and features. Not only that, our Editor-in-chief Dez Skinn will be along to keep us all in check. Dez is a publishing legend and started STARBURST back in 1977, as well as being behind the much-loved **Hammer House of Horror**, **Monster Mag**, and **Doctor Who Weekly**. It's going to be fantastic gathering of like-minded folk and we're looking forward to meeting you all.

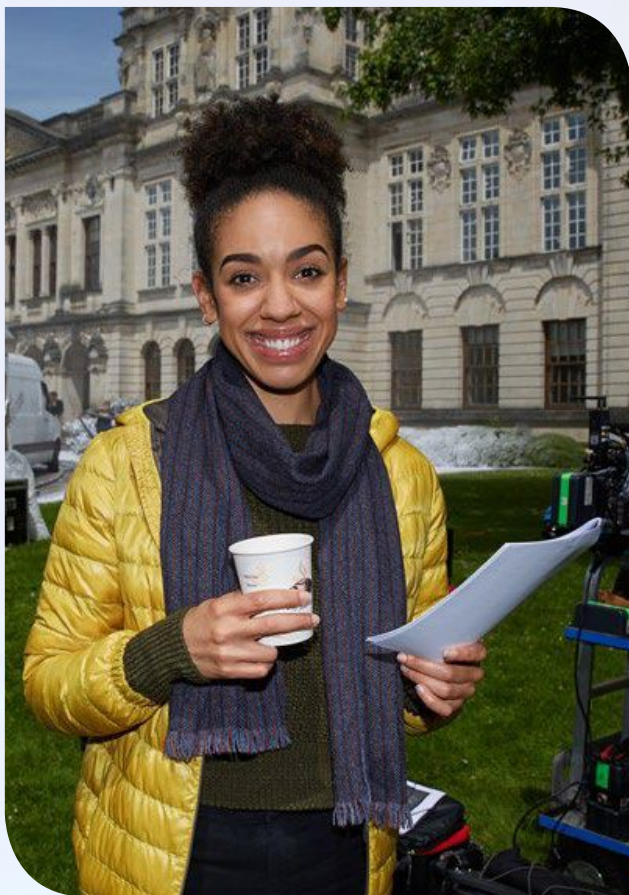
The STARBURST International Film Festival takes place in Manchester on **AUGUST 26TH - 28TH.**

Tickets are on sale now by heading over to **STARBURSTFILMFEST.CO.UK.**

Accommodation is also available at an incredibly affordable rate of £129 for three nights. Bear in mind this is Bank Holiday weekend - you won't get one night anywhere else for that price!



OUTSIDE THE BOX



Series Ten Filming Begins

Cameras have begun rolling in Cardiff on the tenth series of **Doctor Who**, and eager fans have spotted both Peter Capaldi, returning for his third series as the Doctor, and Pearl Mackie, as new companion Bill, on location. Pearl's first scenes have been shot at Cardiff University, standing in for 'St. Luke's University, Bristol', which hints at Bill's character. The Doctor may be set to travel with that most disreputable of life-forms - the student. This episode, the first to be shot, will open next year's twelve-episode run. Before this series broadcasts, however, we've also got this year's Christmas special, which has not yet been filmed, to look forward to.

Nardole New World

Every **Doctor Who** fan has their dream returning character. Some of us would love to see what Leela's up to, others pine for a bit more Jack Harkness. Peter Capaldi himself recently said he'd love to see Carole Ann Ford return as Susan. But Steven Moffat's trumped all those ideas... Remember Nardole, River Song's dopey sidekick from last year's Christmas special, played by beloved comedy treasure Matt Lucas? He's back!

OK, we jest, but it does seem an odd choice - firstly because he kind of got his head chopped off and put in a big robot, and secondly because he wasn't the most developed

of characters, being more a source of festive comic relief. However, Lucas has promised that his character will be 'more textured' this time around, and we all remember how much Catherine Tate's Donna improved between her Christmas special and her full series, so... benefit of the doubt and all that. Nardole will be appearing in several episodes of the new series, though it's not yet clear how many.

In other casting news, Stephanie Hyam will play a guest role in Episode One; she was seen recently as Lily Clarke in ITV's **Jekyll and Hyde**, and has also appeared in **Sherlock** and **Peaky Blinders**.

Writer Announcements

In addition to the casting news, the BBC have announced some of Series Ten's writers. It's no surprise that the opening episode will be written by showrunner Moffat; Lawrence Gough will direct. The second episode, however, comes from the pen of Frank Cottrell-Boyce, a writer who's earned much acclaim for his children's novels and feature film work, though his Series Eight **Who** episode *In the Forest of the Night* divided opinion. Episodes three and four will be scripted by Sarah Dollard, who killed Clara in last year's popular *Face the Raven*, and **Who** newcomer Mike Bartlett, writer of the BBC's **Doctor Foster**. Later on, there'll be an episode by, surprise surprise, Mark Gatiss, who's written for every series since Moffat took charge.

CLASS to Have LGBT Lead

Patrick Ness, the writer of upcoming **Who** spin-off **Class**, has announced that one of the lead characters of the series will be LGBT. He tweeted this news after attending a vigil remembering the victims of the tragic Orlando massacre: "Been asked if **Class** will have LGBT representation in it. Will a lead character with a boyfriend who he kisses & sleeps with and loves do? We were keeping that secret, but today that secret doesn't seem very important. #lovewins" Ness seems thoroughly committed to telling diverse stories, which only makes us more excited to meet the group of Coal Hill School sixth formers his show will follow. **Class** is currently filming in Cardiff and will be released via the now-online BBC Three this autumn, with a BBC One screening later in the year.



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WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK
AT THE WHONIVERSE
BY JR SOUTHALL



So here we are, just over halfway through what the Canadians have dubbed The Year of No *Doctor Who*, twelve months in which there's less *Doctor Who* than there has been at any point since the series returned to our screens back in 2005.

Except that's not quite true; there might be fewer new episodes of televised *Doctor Who* this year than there were in 2009, or 2012, or 2015. But in any other sense, the idea that there is less *Doctor Who* now than there has been since 2004 couldn't be further from the truth.

The notion of this being The Year of No *Doctor Who* put me in mind of an urban myth that was doing the rounds a few years ago, which stated that there were now more people alive on this planet than had ever died – collectively, that is, since our species first evolved. At first, this idea seemed ridiculous – and as it turned out, it wasn't true. But closer inspection revealed that the maths wasn't quite as ludicrous as it first appeared. If each generation trebles in size and lasts for two generations

before it expires (and this isn't, as an average, especially hard to believe), then the exponential growth of the species will always keep its living members at a greater number than the sum of the dead. In fact, as best as I can work it out, the population needs to do little more than double with each generation for this to remain true.

The relevance of this to The Year of No *Doctor Who* isn't to do with any weird concept of the series breeding while nobody's looking, but the simple fact that (film canister bonfires in the 1970s notwithstanding) every time a new episode of the programme comes along, it increases the total number of episodes that now exist. This might feel like an obvious thing to say, but it's worth stopping to think about, if only because it sometimes seems like nobody really does.

By 1989, the BBC had broadcast 695 episodes of *Doctor Who*, a number that increased by only one (albeit at approximately four times the length) in the following sixteen years. Still, even allowing for the 97 episodes that remain missing, that

is (taking *The Five Doctors* and Season 22 into account) the equivalent of 620 episodes of *Doctor Who* that are permanently available for us to enjoy. The modern revival has increased this number by a further 130 discrete episodes, conservatively the equivalent of around 263 original instalments, giving us a library of roughly 883 extant 25-minute episodes' worth of *Doctor Who* to watch. Whenever we like.

As an aside, it's nice to think that 2017 will take us past 1,000 25-minute episodes' worth that have been made. That's a lot of *Doctor Who*.

In addition to this, there is such a wealth of licensed fiction out there it's doubtful many of us have ever worked their way through all of it. Beginning in June 1991, Virgin Books began what at the time felt like the next best thing to televised *Doctor Who*, an official-ish continuation of the series that went by the name The New Adventures. While the manner in which these stories diverged from the tone and content of the television programme was such that very few of us think of them now

as 'real *Doctor Who*', they were at the very least an interesting avenue for the wider universe to explore. Indeed, they probably shed some light on how a fandom that had grown up faster than the series considered what it should be able to articulate, beyond that which was expressible in what even by the end was still regarded as a children's programme. The first four books in the range, the Timewyrm story arc, were a relatively gentle introduction to the publications, featuring the Seventh Doctor and Ace in stories that were a little more involved than latter television outings, but not so much so that readers couldn't imagine what they might look like on the screen. It wasn't long before more adolescent themes emerged and the books took their own path, far away from anything John Nathan-Turner might have sanctioned.

Virgin soon began plundering the series' further history with its Missing Adventures, new stories featuring older Doctors that slipped more or less seamlessly into the programme's continuity – and when Virgin lost its licence in the wake of the 1996 TV Movie, the BBC took over the mantle with the Eighth Doctor Adventures and Past Doctor Adventures, essentially providing more of the same. With the return of the programme to TV, the New Series Adventures have limited themselves to telling stories that are acceptable to the programme's more juvenile audience, but the BBC are still publishing occasionally more adult fare, nowadays by name authors and sometimes revisiting past Doctors once again.

The various Doctors have enjoyed something in the region of 400 adventures in long-form fiction, as well as countless other short trips – and then there are the many hundreds of comic strip adventures that have taken place in the pages of *TV Comic* and *Doctor Who Weekly* and their descendants and brethren. The plots and characterisation of the comic strips have occasionally been at variance with the tone and topics of their television parent, but by combining visual representation with prose



storytelling, in some ways the experience is closer than the one you might get by reading the novels and short stories. And with any number of collected editions now on the market, they are rather easier to access and more substantial a pleasure than you might anticipate.

In July of 1999, Big Finish released *The Sirens of Time*, the first official audio play starring actors who had previously appeared on TV. A multi-Doctor story featuring three ex-incumbents of the television series among its participants, Nicholas Briggs' story was the beginning of a monthly range that has since added the Eighth Doctor to its roster and racked up over 200 releases – and if you add the various offshoot ranges, which now include adventures for the Fourth, Tenth, and War Doctors as well as the Companion Chronicles and a variety of spin-offs, that number probably more than doubles. The company has now become a valuable part of the series' profile, employing talents as diverse as Lisa

Bowerman (Karra in *Survival*) as a director and previous members of the television supporting cast, such as Nina Sosanya and Keith Drinkel, in new roles.

For fans of televised *Doctor Who*, Big Finish is about as close as you can get without having the actual moving pictures in front of you. Familiar television teams such as the Sixth Doctor and Peri, or the Seventh and Ace, are now far more prevalent on audio than they ever were on TV – and names such as John Dorney and Matt Fitton are as familiar to fans of Big Finish's output as those of Robert Holmes and David Whitaker will have been, with the likes of Justin Richards and Gary Russell having been prolific across a variety of platforms. Together with dozens of audio books such as *Hornet's Nest* and *Destiny of the Doctor*, and genuine radio-first *Doctor Who* like *Slipback* and *The Ghosts of N-Space*, new stories featuring old Doctor and companion teams set during the series' bygone days, as well as its present, outnumber the televised output by some considerable distance. The good Doctor might have thus far enjoyed 265 adventures on our TV screens (depending, of course, upon what you consider 'counts'), but that is literally just a small fraction of the overall number of stories he's now been involved in. The extended *Doctor Who* universe is broader and deeper than the small screen could ever contain.

So, as the autumn evenings fall upon us, instead of forgetting all about *Doctor Who* for an extra six months this year, why not reacquaint yourself with some of those stories you haven't revisited for a while – that McCoy you haven't seen since transmission, or that Hartnell DVD that's still in its cellophane – or better yet make some new acquaintances, with those parts of the extended canon that you haven't heretofore had the wherewithal to visit? Just for an hour once a week for three months this autumn, make the absence of *Doctor Who* a voyage of discovery rather than an excuse for a grump.

ARTWORK BY SIMON BRETT





RELATIONSHIPS IN TIME AND SPACE

In consideration of the relationship between Madame Vastra and Jenny, of *Doctor Who*'s Paternoster Gang - possibly the nearest Steven Moffat ever got to the Suicide Squad - let's now get under the covers and take a look at his attempts to get things a bit more grown up...

The mention, and indeed depiction, of such an interspecies pairing is astoundingly daring, but has been made permissible in these days of more adult *Who* content by our outgoing showrunner himself.

For was it not he who laid the foundations with his own writing début towards the end of Series One back in 2005 with *The Empty Child* and *The Doctor Dances*, the art of shuffling about with some sense of rhythm given new meaning and bringing back some implied memories of after-dark activity for the Doctor?

As poet Robert Frost once said, "*Dancing is a vertical expression of a horizontal desire*". And as the Ninth incarnation of the man who'd seemingly forgotten he could do it is quick to tell naïve young Rose Tyler, "*Nine hundred years old, me. I've been around a bit. I think you can assume at some point I've danced*".

The music of Glenn Miller will later be put to great use in illustrating his moves as he swings and dips his lady friend around the TARDIS console room to the strains of *Moonlight Serenade*, possibly by way of an apology for that lame 'trying to resonate concrete' excuse from their earlier alone time!

Following a quite literal parting of the ways, between Christopher Eccleston and

the programme itself, with David Tennant putting what he'd learned from his appearance in BBC Three's *Casanova* into practice just four episodes into his second series as the Tenth Doctor, the man from Gallifrey would get down once again.

His partner this time out? Madame de Pompadour, mistress to King Louis XV of France. Sensitive to his loneliness, it's once again up to the lady to make the first move as she encourages her guardian angel of

sorts to take her for a spin.

All a far cry from his first accidental efforts in wooing the opposite sex, as you'll know if you've tracked down a copy of *The Aztecs*, as the older-looking young man he started out as blunders his way into an engagement to the lovely Cameca.

Bringing new meaning to the phrase 'hot chocolate', the simple act of making a nice cup of cocoa is construed as the most romantic of gestures. All before Ian



(no doubt already exasperated) has had chance to give him that talk about the birds and the bees!

IAN: *Where did you get hold of this?*

DOCTOR: *My fiancée.*

IAN: *I see. Your what?*

DOCTOR: *Yes, I made some cocoa and got engaged. Don't giggle, my boy, it's neither here nor there.*

Rather cruelly, she's jilted in favour of a return to the TARDIS - which he will literally later call a sexy thing immediately following regeneration into his Eleventh body - and pastures new, spiriting himself and his companions off to the Sense-Sphere. Speaking of the younger looking and differently chinned older man he would become, we surely can't neglect his long-running fling of sorts with one Professor River Song....

Inspired by *The Time Traveller's Wife*, the couple meet out of sequence as per their personal time streams. Hence his progression from a point where he hasn't a clue who she is in *Silence of the Library/Forest of the Dead*, again penned by Moffat, to their wedding in, well, *The Wedding of River Song*.

Wibbly-wobbly lovey-dovey, especially considering her conception aboard the TARDIS in *The Big Bang*. Perhaps the ultimate dirty joke from Steven's schoolboy humour file!

Which brings us nicely - in a roundabout manner - to the quest to rescue diddy Melody Pond. A *Good Man Goes to War* finds the tweed-jacketed one calling in a few favours from associates including those who will come to be known as the Paternoster Gang after taking lodgings in Victorian London.

But what had he done for them? In Vastra's case, it seems he humanised her in a manner of speaking, setting her apart from those of her kind first seen alongside Jon Pertwee's Third Doctor in *Doctor Who*



and *The Silurians* attempting to claim back their Earth from the apes - humanity - who'd taken it from them during their long hibernation, the drilling at Wenley Moor having woken them up.

Indeed, were it not for his finding her deep in the bowels of the London Underground - the setting for much of *The Web of Fear* - as she was pondering whether or not to gobble up a few hapless tunnel diggers, she may well have gone the way of Alaya and Restac.

In a nice bit of circularity, Chris Chibnall - whom we know now to be the man taking over from Moffat - would reference elements of this in the comeback of their species for *The Hungry Earth/Cold Blood*.

And in Strax's case, it would seem that for this particular member of the Sontaran race, the potato-heads having also first served as militaristic foes for the best known practitioner of Venusian Aikido in

The Time Warrior, the man he's become a fair few faces down the line helps him see the goodness in nursing where before he had seen it as the gravest of court martials.

"I serve a penance to restore the honour of my clone batch. It is the greatest punishment a Sontaran can endure, to help the weak and sick."

The long-awaited call to return to arms comes from the sudden materialisation of a familiar police box. And in yet another call-back to the *Web*, Patrick Troughton's commute along London's subterranean transport network alongside Frazer Hines and Deborah Watling, his first full assignment alongside Vastra and Jenny in the Gang comes in *The Snowmen*, the first televised return for the Great Intelligence since that fateful day in 1968.

Re-acquaintance with the Doctor and Clara Oswald will see them aiding in investigation of *The Crimson Horror*, during which reference is made to times past when he wore his Fifth and youngest face until then-current incumbent Matt Smith came along.

The most human and sporting of the lot was played by Peter Davison, **"Ooo, I once spent a hell of a long time trying to get a gobby Australian to Heathrow Airport"**.

Tegan did indeed reach her intended destination at precisely the wrong time in *Time-Flight*. A near miss also occurs in *The Visitation*.

TEGAN: *Is that supposed to be Heathrow?*

ADRIC: *It is.*

TEGAN: *Well, they've certainly let the grass grow since I was last there.*

ADRIC: *Well, actually, they haven't built the airport yet. We're about three hundred years early.*

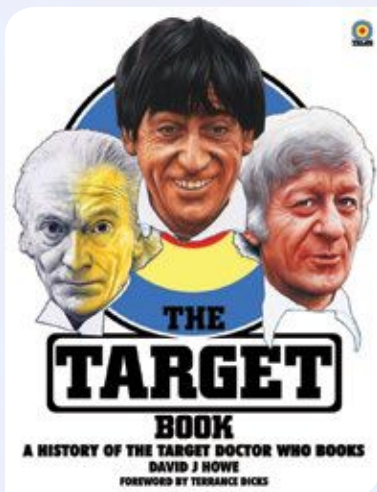
Long after that, the Gang will be there to aid his most recent change of looks and personality into a craggier Peter - Capaldi - in *Deep Breath*. What are friends for, eh?

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY



REVIEWS

THE LATEST
DOCTOR WHO
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



THE TARGET BOOK: A HISTORY OF THE TARGET DOCTOR WHO BOOKS

AUTHOR: DAVID J HOWE / PUBLISHER: TELOS PUBLISHING LTD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

To a certain group of fans (of which this reviewer is one), Target's Doctor Who book range was an integral part of their childhood back in those heady days of the 1970s.

These were the days before the rise

of home video and the advent of DVD and VOD, where if you missed an episode of your favourite programme on the three channels available (yes that's right, just three TV channels), then you had to hope it would be repeated in the summer. In the case of Doctor Who, repeats were scarce at best. Thankfully, Target offered a sliver of salvation with regards to missed episodes and parents memories of Hartnell and Troughton stories, with their range of Doctor Who novelisations.

The Target Book: A History of the Target Doctor Who Books tells the story of how a minor, insignificant publisher's imprint became a powerhouse in the world of children's books and the problems it encountered from its inception in 1973 until its demise in 1994. Originally published in 2007, this new hardback edition has been expanded and improved, with errors from the previous edition having been corrected.

The book itself is a treasure trove of gorgeous artwork, particularly Chris Achilleos' book covers that became synonymous with the range, and his involvement is covered extensively. There is also a wealth of unused and rejected artwork, plus the story of how one artist found inspiration for his cover of The Space Pirates after seeing Tom Selleck in Runaway on a cover of STARBURST Magazine. Along with the main text, there are exhaustive sidebars that cover the writers, editors and

other contributors that made the books a publishing phenomenon. There's some surprising revelations too, such as how Terrence Dicks' novelisations were often cruelly received by fans, and how authors of the early books would use the opportunity to flesh out their own scripts before publishing time constraints put an end to any such creativity.

This book is an indispensable guide to anyone who grew up with, and feels nostalgic towards, these books. Indeed, there are quotes dotted throughout the book which will be immediately familiar to readers, such as " ...he had a pleasant, open face..." or "...as if some vast primitive being were in torment..." Even the chapter headings of this book mimic those of the novelisations, such as Countdown to Doom and The Terror Begins.

For a generation, the Doctor Who novels were the gateway into reading for pleasure and an introduction to broadening one's literary experiences. Indeed, this reviewer went on to discover the likes of Bradbury, Asimov, Philip K. Dick et al., and all because of an alien who travels in a blue box through time and space.

CHRISTIAN JONES

★★★★★★★★★ 9



THE LEGENDS OF RIVER SONG

AUTHOR: JENNY T. COLGAN, JACQUELINE RAYNER, STEVE LYONS, GUY ADAMS, ANDY LANE / PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

There are a lot of Doctor Who books being published, and for most fans the decision will be which ones are worth reading? If that's all you need to know, then the answer for The Legends of River Song is yes, this one is worth reading. You want more?

As the title might suggest, this 224-page book consists of a set of stories about River Song. In total there are five stories, each written by an author very familiar with Doctor Who, and in fact all have been involved in writing for Big Finish, with Jenny T. Colgan and Guy Adams writing for River Song in particular. The other writers are Jacqueline Rayner, Steve Lyons (who both write for Doctor Who Magazine) and Andy Lane (who writes the Young Sherlock Holmes series).

So the book has a good pedigree; it also has five entertaining stories and comes across as a coherent set of tales without any need for an arc. Although the authors take different angles on River, they all capture her sense of humour and irony and all feel like they are writing about the same character. The stories themselves have the relevant mix of time travel, glamour

and larger than life escapades we associate with the character from the TV show, but here and there give us insight into River beyond what we have seen on screen. All the stories are written in first person, which helps tell us more about River, and her inner thoughts on her relationship with the Doctor are touched on several times, even though he doesn't feature in many of the stories. The authors raise a few questions without imposing their own answers, and this adds a dimension to the stories, without dominating the narrative.

There are no bad stories here, and like any good short story collection it gives the reader the chance to try authors they may not be familiar with. In this case, all five come out with glowing reports. Is there a best? That depends on personal taste; all five have something unique to recommend them and this is the mark of a well-chosen collection.

TONY JONES

★★★★★★★★★ 8



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LIVVY BOOTE is...

THE GIRL FROM PLANET X

After about a year and a half of writing my articles, I've found things getting rather repetitive. A lot of the time it's either 'this movie is so sexist!' or 'this show is so feminist!' More often than not, it's because I'm looking at the new Marvel movie or some exciting new Netflix series. But recently, I've been thinking a lot about horror, and it's occurred to me that discussing the portrayal of women in horror is an entirely different ball game.

If you've ever studied English literature, it might not have escaped you that pretty much everything that's written in the English language is either about sex or death. An exaggeration, sure, but when you sit down and think about it, it's not too far off. And what better way to explore mankind's fascination with sex and death than horror? In this genre, they go hand in hand.

Whether it's the oddly arousing, exhilarating feeling you get when watching a horror film or the appearance of a busty main character, it's hard

to deny that sex is implicit within the genre. Sit down and watch any horror film of your choosing, there's probably a scene with a woman wearing not very much. Either she's in bed, sleeping in her underwear, when she suddenly hears something down the corridor... or something's ripped her shirt open and she's screaming hysterically... or, of course, there's the obligatory sex scene, her moans turning into screams...

There are plenty of movies that don't fall into this stereotype, of course, but it's interesting to consider why women, and only women, are sexualised in horror.

What is sexy about women in horror movies? If you've watched anything ever, you'll know that they're sexualised in every genre - but there is something about horror that is particularly sexy; fear heightening the arousal. There's just something about a female character being chased, bitten by a vampire, or torn apart by a zombie.

The more you allow yourself to think about it, the more unsettling it is.

It goes beyond a fixation on death and gore. It goes beyond the morbid fascination of what would happen if someone made a human centipede (the trailer alone traumatised me for life, by the way, and yet I still willingly watched it). Regardless of their gender, we watch horror to see characters being, well, horrified. But in a society where women are undoubtedly oppressed, where they are often abused and belittled, they inevitably also pull the short straw in horror. It used to be that women were purely victims, never the heroes. As soon as they appeared on screen, they'd become hysterical, do something stupid in response, and then die. They'd be preyed on in the shower or attacked by their mad, possessed husband.

But now it's different, I think. People recognise that female characters shouldn't always die immediately. They should die later, with their top torn off, mascara in perfect condition. The front cover of the DVD should have them in their bikini, oblivious, as they stand in a pool of piranha-infested waters. They're not hysterical - that's an archaic concept. They're just hyper-sexualised. It's satisfying to watch the stupid yet undeniably sexy blonde bimbo die. Correct me if I'm wrong, but... it's like horror fetishises women dying.

Despite this rather frightening discovery, I still love horror.

More often than not, the female characters are either idolised for being sexy, axe-wielding babes, or they're completely useless with absolutely no personality other than 'worried mother'. Or, of course, they're the monster. This is another thing that's occurred to me. Have you noticed that the majority of ghosts and ghouls these days that are genuinely frightening aren't zombies or Dracula, but little girls, vengeful mothers, and wives?

Let's look at some of the most influential horror movies in the past couple of decades: *Insidious*, *The Ring*, *The Grudge*, *The Blair Witch Project*, and *The Conjuring*. All of these involve an evil woman or girl. Every. One. And if you watch *Silent Hill* (not recommended), then you'll get the fun double whammy of evil little girl and weirdly sexy zombie nurses.

After deep thought, I can't find an example of a distinctly male monster that's scary. In the films above, they're all scary because little girls are meant to be innocent but then in a turn of



Samara from *The Ring* is so creepy because she's a little girl

IF THERE'S ONE GENRE THAT GIVES WOMEN A PARTICULARLY HARD TIME, IT'S HORROR...



Why are women in horror fetishised?

events they're murderous ghosts, or because they're witches. But with any other creepy-crawly, it doesn't matter what gender they are. You don't think of the demon in *Paranormal Activity* and wonder, are they a boy or a girl? You don't see a boy ghost and think argh! A creepy man! They're creepy because they're a man! It's always more unsettling if it's a woman. As Shakespeare said, "*Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned*".

So that's why women are scarier, then. Women are just scarier when they're angry, because by societal standards, they're not meant to be angry. So when they are, it's terrifying. There are, of course, exceptions to this. Damien from *The Omen* famously is a little boy. But he isn't scary because he's a boy, he's scary because he's a child, and evil children are unnatural.

Horror is one of my favourite genres because for me, it's an excellent way to vent stress and anxiety. I also find it really interesting to consider what scares people. So I decided to really sit down and think about why women are portrayed the way they are in horror, and so there are my thoughts. I'm not particularly angry about it, just genuinely interested in the motives behind it all.

If you want to find some horror that goes against these stereotypes though, then I would suggest *American Horror*

Story. It's a great TV series which you can find on Netflix that also has some great feminist stuff, often narrating the actions of realistic women in horrific situations. Anything written by Stephen King is a good shout, as he likes to focus on the aggressive nature of men as well as having some pretty dang cool female

characters across his books. And *The Cabin in the Woods* is a brilliant horror comedy, ridiculing the cringeworthy, sexist stereotypes that we see in horror.

I think my favourite horror movie that doesn't make any of the mistakes we've looked at is *The Babadook*. This film focuses on depression and PTSD and how it can manifest itself in terrifying ways; plus it's directed by a woman, giving it a good feminist edge. It follows the life of a widowed mother and her child, dealing with the grief of losing a father and husband. The mother allows herself to become secluded, does not talk about her problems, and succumbs to depression, which, of course, also affects her young son. The film is shot in bleak greys, as you would imagine, but the emptiness of their house adds to the strange 'limbo' feeling one might feel when depressed. The 'Babadook' is the result of her attempt to stay strong, and not give in to her feelings; a monster who bangs on their door and demands to let itself in and control their lives. In the end, she masters it by caring for it.

So, women in horror is a very strange subject to think about. It's very varied and has changed a lot since horror movies started to come about. After decades of hysterical women, followed by more of them dying horrifically with their boobs out, it's good to see more realistic, interesting stuff come out. Let's see what the rest of 2016 has in store. ✦



The Babadook: a far more interesting realistic portrayal of a woman in a horrific situation



Kill Switch

BY JACK BOTTOMLEY

From viral phenomenon to big screen horror outing, STARBURST looks at how *LIGHTS OUT* came about and how it aims to corner cinemagoers on a movie night out.

Sometimes some of the best ideas stem from something incredibly simple, and this is especially prevalent when it comes to the horror genre. See *The Blair Witch Project* realistically dragging us into the nefarious woodlands with its petrified (and snotty) characters, *Halloween* popularising the mad man in a mask slasher or *A Nightmare on Elm Street* using bad dreams against you. Indeed, the simplest things are often the most frightening and they don't come any simpler and scarier than a fear of the dark... and we don't mean the Iron Maiden album. Darkness, from an early age - experts place it around the age of two and over - has this absorbing power to scare us. Freud associated it with being a manifestation of separation anxiety disorder but whatever the case, when the lights go out, the dark engulfs us and nearly everyone has felt that sense of dread and unease at some point. For most, the fear passes but for many it can elevate to the point of being an overwhelming nightly terror, one that goes by many names, nyctophobia being the most well-known. So the dark is scary but as horror has adeptly shown, the darkness itself is not really what terrifies us; it is what said blackness could contain. Enter *Lights Out*.



The film marks the big-screen début of director David F. Sandberg and is based on his acclaimed and award-winning 2013 short film of the same name. Produced by James Wan, *Lights Out* tells the story of Rebecca (Teresa Palmer), who thought she had left her frightening past of being haunted by the dark behind her. However, when Rebecca hears that her younger brother Martin (Gabriel Bateman) is suffering from the same problems that she did in her youth, she seeks out the truth behind what takes place when the lights go out and attempts to uncover whom this mysterious entity prowling the shadows really is.

Adapting a short film to feature-length can be an arduous task and sometimes not pay off (*Pixels*). However, as films like Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead*, Tim Burton's woefully underrated 2012 animation *Frankenweenie* and Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook* have shown, it can be done, and very bloody well. Sandberg's original 2013 Fright Meter Award-Winner certainly was a 'to the point' piece of work, using its short duration to throw you straight into a nightmarish night time, as a woman (Lotta Losten - Sandberg's real-life wife) is terrorised by something that appears in the dark, whenever the lights are switched off. The short is hair raising and skin pricklingly intense for its three-minute running time, boasting more expert atmospherics and frights than some features that have thirty times the length.

The basis for the short came from twisting the idea of a child's imaginary friend, and matured from that point, with Sandberg stating at WonderCon 2016, "I always thought it would be scarier if the parent had an invisible friend". He has a point, though the very visible presence in his short (fully revealed in a memorably

shit-scary final frame) is hardly what we would call a friend - a fiend perhaps, but this is not someone we'd sit and talk to at bed time, that is for damn sure.



The short's viral fame is really what sent lightbulbs flashing in the heads of executives on a full feature-length adaptation, with co-producer Lawrence Grey saying, "I saw the short before it blew up to the 150 million views. It was really early and it had just kind of debuted on Reddit and was starting to get some traction. It's this big genius universal idea. We all know it. We're all afraid of the dark. We all know that feeling of, 'I saw that thing out of the corner of my eye. Is that a tree? Is that my laundry? Or is it something more sinister than that?' There was real craft to how he did it". From here on, arguably the biggest and most successful figure in the struggling mainstream horror market, James Wan (Saw, *Insidious*, *The Conjuring*), was encouraged by Grey to be involved, but it was really upon meeting Sandberg that he fully entered the project. Co-producing alongside Grey and the film's writer/co-producer Eric Heisserer (director of 2013's *Hours* and writer of



2011's *Final Destination 5* and *The Thing* prequel, as well as the 2010 remake of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* - but we'll forgive him for that one).

Wan said that he saw a lot of his younger self in Sandberg, saying, "This guy has what it takes, and it's really hard to find filmmakers that get these things. People think it's easy to make a horror movie that works. It's not, that's why there's a lot of crap out there. We'll support him, we'll give him the tools, we'll give him a bit of the money that he needs to make the movie, we'll surround him with a good crew. And hopefully that will let him be creative as he can be." High praise indeed from one of the genre's biggest contemporary names and the respect was clearly mutual on this project, with Sandberg stating how supportive, helpful and wise Wan was on set.

Lights Out appears to be a throwback to the haunted horrors of the '70s and '80s with a dark dwelling thing tormenting the lead characters. Due to this approach, and the film's smaller budget of \$5million, Sandberg has veered more towards practical effects over CGI, which has suited recent horror standouts like the aforementioned Aussie horror *The Babadook* and the work of Guillermo del Toro very well. This is an old-fashioned story, in many ways the oldest of stories, a tale about unseen forces that feed on your fright of the unknown. Much like last year's David Robert Mitchell indie hit *It Follows*, *Lights Out* tells a very universal story of fear, one that dates back as far as storytelling itself, but looks to do so in as attention-grabbing a fashion as possible.

As expected, the narrative has been fleshed out with suggestions that lead character Rebecca and her family are somehow linked to this entity and by looking into what or who this haunting presence is or was. Much like Wan's *Insidious* series or the very popular *Paranormal Activity* films, you get the feeling that a mythology is being constructed in Heisserer's screenplay. Not merely a random ghost story, there seems to be more at play here, as we uncover secrets. Killer entities or creatures from

the darkness have been done numerous times before, but *Lights Out* hopes to offer more than jump scares; its atmosphere will burrow into your mind with a story that pokes and preys on your subconscious fears of the shadows. Simply put, this is a film that aims to satisfy the new school with the old school and tell a worthwhile story at the same time. Oh, and keep you up that night and for weeks.

Australian-born actress Teresa Palmer (*The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, *Warm Bodies*) leads the cast as Rebecca, and it's her first horror film for 10 years, her last being the critically maligned *The Grudge 2* (2006), while the young Gabriel Bateman (*Annabelle*, Robert Kirkman's TV series *Outcast*) also takes on big role duties as Martin, who we can imagine plays an integral part in the family plot that seems to be at the heart of this story. Meanwhile, Maria Bello (*The Cooler*, *A History of Violence*, *Prisoners*) also makes an appearance, playing a character called Sophie. Rounding out the cast members is the star of the original short, Lotta Losten, as Esther, Alexander DiPersia as Bret, Amiah Miller (soon to feature in the upcoming *War of the Planet of the Apes*) as the younger Rebecca (confirming we will get more than just a hint at the lead character's backstory) and, interestingly, English comedian Yewande 'Andi' Osho as Emma. Also dipping his toes into horror

for the first time is composer Benjamin Wallfisch (*Pressure*, *The Escapist*), while editor Michel Aller (*Paranormal Activity: The Ghost Dimension*) knows a little more about ghost stories. Wan also brings *Fast & Furious 7* cinematographer Marc Spicer to *Lights Out* with him too, making up a quite eclectic cast and crew.

From the release of the short and its resulting online success to the beginning of the principal photography for this feature on June 29th, 2015, to the impending release of the film, *Lights Out* has slowly crept its way towards us, suitably tucked away in the shadowy corners of the release schedule. Featuring a cast that is not crammed with A-listers, a fresh director, and a plot that aims to tip its cap to the classic chillers of a bygone era, all under the supervision of a guy who knows a thing or two about how to construct a cinematic haunted house ride, could this be a resurgent moment for mainstream horror? The amount of fresh blood pulsating through this project and the unshakably effective scenes of the dark-dwelling figure certainly raise the anticipation.

Lights Out could well be a breakout moment for its director in the same way Saw was for Leigh Whannell and James Wan (who adapted the film from their own 2003 short). Maybe we will be seeing that 'from the makers of' promotional billing for this film years down the line. Only time will tell, but with Sandberg already confirmed to helm 2017's *Annabelle 2*, the sequel to the 2014 spin-off of Wan's 2013 hit *The Conjuring*, it seems the lights are clearly on bright in regards to this emerging director's future, even if they will be very much off for much of his debut feature. Is there reason to 'be afraid, be very afraid'? We sure hope so... Now go tape that light switch on, so you survive the summer nights long enough to get to see it. ✦

LIGHTS OUT gets closer and closer and closer to its UK Release Date, where it will terrorise a cinematorium from August 19th.



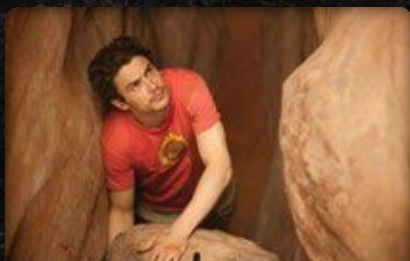
SURVIVAL INSTINCT

by Phil Beresford

STARBURST TAKES A LOOK AT A SUBGENRE OF CINEMA THAT HIGHLIGHTS HUMANITY'S BASE NATURE - TO ENDURE WHATEVER THE PERIL.

"It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to."

Wise words from old Bilbo Baggins, and particularly good advice for the good folk of movieland when it comes to venturing forth into the great outdoors. Not that many of them have heeded it, of course, and a ruddy good job too, at least for us if not them. Because, horrid people that we are, we'd far rather see Leonardo DiCaprio being mauled by a bear, Tom Hanks performing DIY dentistry, and Liam Neeson punching a wolf in the face than watch them rest their slippered feet on a cosy hearth before settling down for a quiet night in front of the telly. Yes, if the movies have taught us anything, it's that heading outdoors is a very, very bad idea.



127 Hours (2010)

Survivalist or 'man against nature' films are not so much a genre as a type of picture that transcends genre, stories with a variation on a dominant theme that we see played out time and again in war movies, westerns, thrillers, horrors, dramas, and science fiction. Think of your favourites and you're liable to recall an intense experience in which you've been forced to wonder "What would I do?" - A consideration that explains why such films can challenge, fascinate, and horrify us in equal measure. When we see James Franco cutting off his own arm to free himself from a boulder that has him trapped in a canyon in *127 Hours* (2010), we ask ourselves if we could have done the same. When we witness a group of

friends deciding to swim to land after their boat capsizes in *The Reef* (2010), we wonder if we could have likewise left the overturned hull to brave potentially shark infested waters. At their best, survivalist films map out visceral journeys that we take with the protagonists, which then play on some of our most primal fears and prejudices, as well as suggesting that Werner Herzog is correct in his belief that the common denominator of the universe is not harmony but chaos, hostility, and murder.



The Reef (2010)

This was most recently evident in *The Revenant* (2015), the story of a trapper and guide, Hugh Glass (Leonardo DiCaprio), who is forced to overcome a succession of horrors in the Dakota wilds in early 19th century America. A beautifully savage film, it's also a kind of greatest hits compilation of the sorts of trials found in countless other movies with similar motifs, as Glass survives an attack by a bear (see also 2015's *Into the Grizzly Maze*), being buried alive (2010's *Buried*), falling off a cliff (2011's *A Lonely Place to Die*),



The Revenant (2015)



Aguirre, Wrath of God (1972)

and attempted murder by a treacherous companion (1997's *The Edge*), all while being hunted by a group of natives (1965's *The Naked Prey*). It's the sort of film you can imagine Herzog nodding sagely at throughout, confirming a philosophy he himself has espoused in movies such as *Grizzly Man* (2005), *Rescue Dawn* (2007) and *Aguirre, Wrath of God* (1972). The latter, a hypnotic and beguiling trip up an Amazon tributary with 16th century conquistadors in search of El Dorado, illustrates the lunacy of imposing human ambition on a world that is ruthlessly indifferent to it, as everyone decides to either go mad, die of hunger, or wander off into the rainforest.



The Blair Witch Project (1999)

Aguirre also suggests that our humanity is so precarious that it is compromised as soon as we're removed from the trappings and checks of civilisation; this idea is never far away when movies take a trip into the woods. Be it copse, forest, or jungle, such expeditions never end well, regardless of whether that excursion is made deliberately or as a consequence of naivety, stupidity, or a failure to plan. Most of us know how things worked out in the Black Hills of Maryland for the aspiring documentarists of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and it was never going to be a good idea for the Carter family to try and take a shortcut across



The Hills Have Eyes (1977)

the Nevada desert in *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977). A combination of hubris, stupidity and bad luck dooms a group of National Guardsmen on manoeuvres in the Louisiana Bayou in Walter Hill's



Southern Comfort (1981)

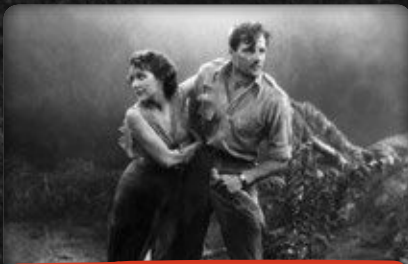
Southern Comfort (1981), who discover how inhospitable both the swamps and the locals can be when one of them fires some blanks at a group of Cajun fishermen. Then there's Brian Dennehy's Sheriff Will Teasle in 1982's *First Blood* (1982), who takes exception to the arrival of former Green Beret John Rambo (Sylvester Stallone) in his town by locking him up for vagrancy. A sequence of ill-advised judgement calls, coupled with



First Blood (1982)

a distinct lack of sensitivity when dealing with a traumatised Vietnam veteran, culminates in a string of dead deputies, and a life or death game of cat and mouse kicking off deep in the Washington state woodlands. *First Blood* also serves as a fine example of the hunter versus hunted scenario and if evolution has hard wired anything into our collective DNA it is the fear of being hunted, of our lives being threatened by someone or something that sees us as nothing more than food or sport. Thus we've had the vicarious thrills of aliens hunting elite special forces in the jungles of Central America (*Predator*, 1987), inbred cannibals hunting teens

in the forests of West Virginia (*Wrong Turn*, 2003), Mayan tribesmen being hunted in the Mesoamerican rainforest (*Apocalypto*, 2006), locals hunting city folk across the countryside of Spain (*King of the Hill*, 2007) and Norway (*Manhunt*, 2007), teenagers hunting each other for the entertainment of TV audiences in dystopian futures (*Battle Royale*, 2000 and *The Hunger Games*, 2012), and a whole raft of tales concerning rich arseholes who find it amusing to hunt people for sport in films such as *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932), *A Game of Death* (1945), *Bloodlust!* (1961), *The 10th Victim* (1965), *The Woman Hunt* (1972), *Deadly Prey* (1987), and *Hard Target* (1993).



The Most Dangerous Game (1932)

Even when films have explored themes of race, class, or gender they have been made more disconcerting by locating the action in the wild, combining very primitive fears with more modern concerns to produce disturbing results. *Eden Lake* (2008) plays on social anxieties in the UK of the creation of an anti-social



Eden Lake (2008)

underclass, one that is regularly demonised in the tabloid press and media. A modern exploitation film, it tells the story of a holidaying middle class couple, who are tortured and hunted by a gang of teenage delinquents across English woodland and new build estates that have



Inbred (2011)

rarely looked as hostile. This fear of the less educated, less cultured 'other', is mined ruthlessly when set in isolated or inhospitable places and taken to extremes in *Inbred* (2011), which does for the good people of the Yorkshire Dales what *Jaws* did for the Great White Shark. Then there's Belgian horror film *The Ordeal* (2004), which shows what can happen if you leave men alone to form communities in the wild. A story of a struggling light entertainer whose car breaks down in the woods, it suggests that, without women, men can usually be relied upon to regress into the sort of psychopathic perverts who'll make whoopee with a cow given half a chance.



The Ordeal (2004)

Masculinity in the wilderness is also explored, although in a very different way, in one of the most notorious mainstream Hollywood films of the '70s, John Boorman's *Deliverance* (1972). Four businessmen decide to get back to nature by taking take a trip down the Cahulawassee River deep into the Georgia wilderness. A difficult watch, its subversion of masculinity is no more challenging than in the scene when Bobby (Ned Beatty) is raped by a local woodsman, and no more surprising than in the side-lining of tough guy Lewis (Burt Reynolds) when he's seriously injured early on.



Deliverance (1972)

So steering clear of the woods in general would seem to be sensible advice but alas, the perils of nature and its wide open spaces are just as dangerous for those who manage to avoid the trees. Out at sea, the challenge of survival has proven no less demanding, as *Lifeboat* (1944), *Open Water* (2003), *Adrift* (2006), *Kon Tiki* (2012), *All is Lost* (2013) and *The Reef* have ably demonstrated. *Lifeboat* (1944) in particular, an early Alfred Hitchcock thriller, is a movie that examines the effects of the struggle for survival on the



Lifeboat (1944)



The Swiss Family Robinson (1960)



Walkabout (1971)

group dynamic and does so with compelling and poignant results, after a lifeboat of survivors rescue a man they suspect is the U-boat captain who sunk their ship.



Lord of the Flies (1963)

Even when sticking to the beach, desert islands have proven to be far from idyllic for anyone unlucky enough to find themselves washed up on one. *Robinson Crusoe* (1954), *Lord of the Flies* (1963), *The Mosquito Coast* (1986), *Six Days and Seven Nights* (1998), *The Beach* (2000), and *Cast Away* (2000) are just a smattering of examples that prove a life lived on a sun-kissed hideaway is no more hospitable than a Peruvian jungle. Admittedly, *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1960) did manage to make a decent fist of it but even they had to see off snakes, tigers, and pirates. As for poor Amanda Donohoe in Nicolas Roeg's



Castaway (1986)

Castaway (1986), she had to contend with the constant presence of Oliver Reed's penis, a horror that few audiences could bring themselves to share judging by the box office gross. Then there's always *The Blue Lagoon* (1980), in which pre-pubescent Brooke Shields and Christopher Atkins find love and an all-over tan on an island paradise, but that's completely and utterly nauseating.



Alive (1993)

often a transformative one that sees them leave something of themselves behind in a wilderness that had threatened to consume them. In the case of Jenny Agutter's abandoned schoolgirl in *Walkabout*, she left behind her sexual innocence; in the case of *The Donner Party* (2009), it was more likely to have been an arm or a leg.

So there you have it, ample movie evidence for those with the good sense to listen to it; you really should consider staying permanently indoors. In the light of which, all we can really advise you to do is to listen to that venerable old hobbit and stay safely tucked up on your sofa with the pizza delivery on speed dial and a nice box set or two lined up next to your widescreen. Just as long as it's nothing to do with Bear Grylls. He might give you ideas.



Flight of the Phoenix (1965)



Cast Away (2000)

Heading further inland, cinematic trips across mountains, deserts and frozen tundra are no less challenging if films like *Flight of the Phoenix* (1965), *Walkabout* (1971), *Seven Alone* (1974), *Alive* (1993), *The Snow Walker* (2003), *The Donner Party* (2009), *The Way Back* (2010) or *The Grey* (2011) are anything to go by. Even when the characters traversing these landscapes survive, the experience is



The Grey (2011)



HORROR Obscura

This month, the mischievous Martin Vnsworth takes three recent underrated movies and thrusts them into the spotlight...



TRIO OF EVIL

With **Horror Obscura**, we're usually championing older films, but we do occasionally try to steer viewers in the direction of some interesting recent offerings that they either may have missed or would otherwise have written off. So we're going to highlight a couple of movies that were first seen last year at FrightFest, and then made their way onto the VOD market through the company's streaming platform that they set up alongside Icon Entertainment.

All of these films are in subgenres that mean they could be so easily disregarded or ignored (particularly since they are all fairly low budget), but when given the chance they are actually rather good.

The Unfolding (2016) opens with a quote from William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, **'The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword, are portions of eternity, too great for the eye of man'**. It's a moody section of a poem that perfectly sets the tone for what's to come.

Although it's shot in a semi-'found footage' style, the movie doesn't fall into too many of the usual traps. *The Unfolding*, instead, is a haunted house tale, which may provoke feelings of déjà vu from fans of the *Paranormal Activity* series at times, but is unique in that it's mixed with the impending dread of the possible end of the world. Sure, there are hand-held and static time-coded cameras, but the addition of sound effects and a score certainly give it the feel of a 'proper' film. And it's all the more engrossing for it.

Researcher Tam (Lachlan Neiboer) and his girlfriend Rose (Lisa Kerr) are spending time in a remote house in Dartmoor to interview the owner of a house that has been the focus of some strange goings-on. As they get to the house, they are met by the man, who's packing his car. He explains that he has to leave, to get back to his family 'due to all the stuff that's kicking off' in the outside world. He hands Tam the keys, and gives him free reign of the place; *"I'm not staying another night in there..."* he tells them. Is it really the thought of impending nuclear war that has spooked him or has the house more to do with it that he is letting on? Well, despite Rose's misgivings about spending time at the house without the owners present, Tam is insistent that they do in the hope of discovering some evidence of psychic activity.

They don't have to wait long, as they wake in the morning to find the kitchen ransacked and the house's entire collection of cutlery embedded in the wall as though something has had a violent temper tantrum.

Their relationship is strained when they experience some terrifying occurrences. A friend, Harvey (Nick Julian), arrives and is instantly accused of playing tricks on them. But he's not behind the sinister and creepy goings-on (despite later pulling a 'jump scare' prank). Harvey decides it's time to bring in Professor Chessman (Robert Daws, somewhat of a TV regular from series such as *The Royal and Poldark*), who in turn sends for a medium, Muriel (*Emmerdale* star Kitty McGeever), who senses the presence of someone called Lucasta. The academic mournfully recounts the story of the unfortunate woman who had lived there before,

THE UNFOLDING



abused by her uncle and whose children had either died in childbirth or were murdered. Attempting to move Lucasta into a peaceful spiritual realm, they unfortunately release something much more malevolent. As the Professor puts it, "What was evil then is still evil today".

First-time director Eugene McGing has been quite prophetic in setting the film in October 2016; not because of the supernatural elements - although they work remarkably well - but with the impending and occasionally subtle disintegration of the outside world. As the Professor says himself, "*The house is acting as a psychic beacon - events happening in the outside are amplified in the house*". In the real world, it's already been a mournful year for many; just look at the high profile deaths and the recent political turmoil, not to mention the ongoing threat of terrorism. While our protagonists are fighting against unseen spirits in the house, outside, things are becoming apocalyptic. Making the film using the now-standard 'found footage' techniques allows for a sense of urgency and palpable terror. As mentioned, this isn't presented as that sort of movie, though. It's very much a 'proper' film and highly rewarding, being full of dread and truly ominous moments. The occasional references to 'what's going on out there' keep the mood on a knife edge and tensions running high. Come the climax, all hell is literally breaking loose.

The already tired and overused 'rom-zom' subgenre gets a shot in the arm with Kyle Ranking's *Night of the Living Deb* (2015). Yay. Yet another play on the classic title, this has got to suck, right? Well, actually, no. Although *Shaun of the Dead* did it years before, *Deb* succeeds with likeable characters and some genuinely funny moments and sparkling dialogue to the extent that the unoriginality is forgivable.

Socially awkward Deb (*Eagleheart*'s Maria Thayer) hooks up with the best looking man in Maine, Portland, on the eve of American Independence Day, but upon waking the next day she overhears Ryan (Michael Cassidy) trying to arrange an escape plan. Bumbling her way through an embarrassing exit, things go downhill very quickly when they find out that a zombie apocalypse is happening all around them. The two polar opposite characters - Deb is a scatty TV news camera operator and Ryan a coconut milk-drinking free thinker hoping to get away from his family business of water production - decide to team up in order to get to their loved ones. Despite her quick wit and bumbling demeanour, she quotes Longfellow and is smart as a button when the shit hits the fan.

Even with the familiar tropes, *Night of the Living Deb* is a fun and surprisingly engaging spin on the old formula, helped in no small part by Maria Thayer being a joy to watch, and the legendary Ray Wise (*Twin Peaks*) owns the screen as Ryan's morally corrupt but family orientated father. If you think the subgenre reached its pinnacle after Simon Pegg and Edgar Wright had finished with it, *Deb* comes along and proves there's still a little life in the corpse of the romantic zombie comedy yet. It may not be as outright gory as *Shaun*, but it does have its fair share of exploding heads and splatter shots. There are a few nods to undead films of the past,

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEB



but they are much more organic than in fare such as *Shaun* and *Dead Heads*. The laughs come less from forced situations and more from inappropriately natural dialogue from Deb and Ryan. In short, it's a joy that has been criminally overlooked.

In a complete change of tone and direction, *Estranged* is a terrifying family drama that demands viewing. The first feature of Adam Levins, it is the film M. Night Shyamalan's *The Visit* so desperately wanted to be and should have been.

January (Amy Manson) and her boyfriend Callum (Simon Quarterman) are involved in a terrible motorbike crash while traveling in Brazil, which results in the young woman temporarily unable to walk and suffering from acute amnesia. Callum takes her back to her family in a remote stately home in the middle of England to recuperate and hopefully gain some of her memory. Although she is received well and given care, she begins to be curious as to why she left in the first place. Had something terrible occurred to cause her to run away?

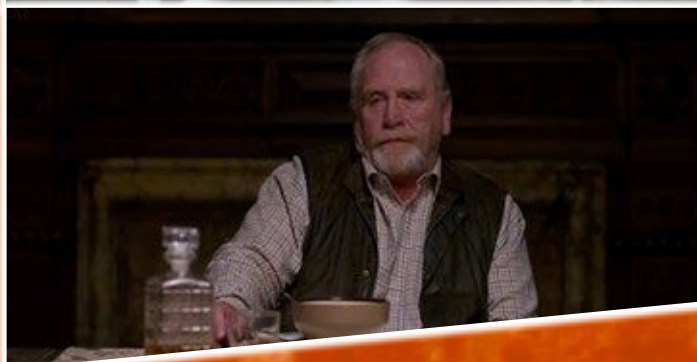
The mood is tetchy as soon as she arrives, and her father, Albert (the ever-imposing James Cosmo), isn't helping the situation, particularly as he asks Callum to leave while attempting to teach him how to shoot. January's brother and sister, Laurence (James Lance, who, no matter how many times we see him in other productions, will forever be bellboy Ben in *I'm Alan Partridge...*) and Kathrine (The Descent's Nora-Jane Noone) add to the unease with a double act of creep and creepier, while mother Marilyn (Eileen Nicholas, *Trainspotting*) is a quiet nervous wreck, almost apologetically subservient to Albert. The house is rustic but sprawling, with only a butler, Thomas (Craig Conway) to keep things going. Clearly put-upon, he's there through family heritage, too. No one seems to want to talk about why she ran away, and it gets worse when she wakes one morning to find Callum gone.

A patient and rewarding film, *Estranged* proves that you can tell a compelling and shocking story without going overboard on visual effects and jump scares. Sure, there's some (bad) CGI gore later on, but this is a study in character, pace, and unknown terror. A little like the classic 1961 film *The Innocents*, January is haunted by a past she doesn't know, or at least that the brain trauma has blocked out for her. When we (and, indeed, the unfortunate girl herself) discover the truth, it only gets worse. By revealing the 'twist' halfway through, we get to see characters truly revel in evil and engage in some genuinely horrific acts. It's unfair to reveal more, but rest assured, it's startlingly unpleasant and deeply upsetting. Just like horror films should be.

All of these movies, as mentioned, were released through the FrightFest Presents VOD strand, and will be among a season of films screened on Horror Channel this August to celebrate the annual festival of fear.

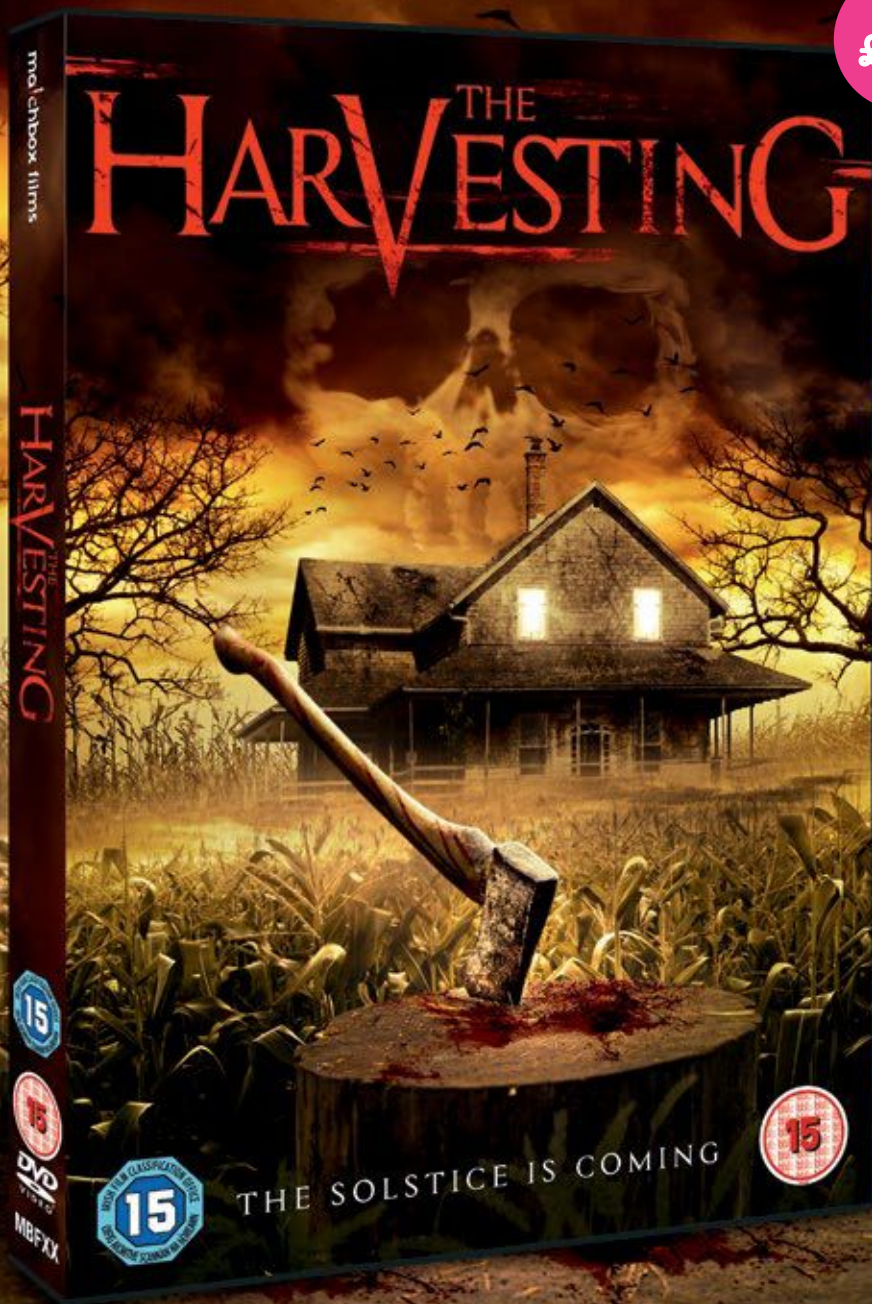
You can tune into Horror Channel on Sky 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138.

ESTRANGED



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Yelchin Dies in Tragic Accident

Anton Yelchin, known to millions as Chekov in the current movie series, was killed in an accident on June 19th. The 27-year-old actor died when his car rolled down the drive at his Los Angeles home, crushing him.

In his short career, Yelchin had given a range of impressive performances in films such as **Only Lovers Left Alive**, **Terminator Salvation**, **Fright Night**, and most recently, **Green Room**. He'll be perhaps best remembered though for his role as Pavel Chekov in the rebooted **Star Trek** movie series. Whilst many, including ourselves, have mixed feelings about the series, Yelchin's performance was a constant highlight. Perfectly capturing both Chekov's naïveté and youthful exuberance, the actor's quirky, charming interpretation of the character rapidly saw him become a fan favourite.

His parents, both professional figure skaters, emigrated from the U.S.S.R. to the U.S. in 1989. He started acting early, making his first TV appearance in an episode of **E.R.** Assorted other roles followed, including Steven Spielberg's sci-fi series **Taken**, before his breakthrough role in **Alpha Dog**. Shortly afterwards he was cast in two iconic sci-fi roles: Kyle Reese in **Terminator Salvation** and Chekov in J. J. Abrams' **Star Trek** reboot, both released in 2009.

Abrams, who directed Yelchin in both **Star Trek** and its sequel, **Into Darkness**, released a statement saying: "You were brilliant. You were kind. You were funny as hell, and supremely talented. And you weren't here nearly long enough". Justin Lin, director of this month's **Star Trek Beyond** tweeted "Still in shock. Rest in peace Anton. Your passion and enthusiasm will live on with everyone that had the pleasure of knowing you".

The new film will be dedicated to his memory.

Many Trek actors joined in the tributes, including several of Yelchin's co-stars. Zoe Saldana tweeted that she was 'devastated'. John Cho added "He was a true artist - curious, beautiful, courageous. He was a great pal and a great son. I'm in ruins", and Zachary Quinto called him "one of the most open and intellectually curious people I have ever had the pleasure to know".

The most touching tribute came from Karl Urban: "Anton was such a beautiful, gentle soul. He sought out new life experience with an unabated passion. He was edgy, incredibly talented and beautifully knowledgeable. His smile was radiant and mischievous. Truly an old soul in a young man's body. He was a loving son. My heart, thoughts and prayers are with Anton's family. I'm devastated. Godspeed, you gorgeous man."

It goes without saying that we at STARBURST would like to extend our sincere condolences to his friends and family.

New series update

Showrunner Bryan Fuller has finally let slip a few details about the upcoming CBS series. Fuller denied a couple of popular rumours, and offered up some details about the new show:

"I've read that we're [set] before **Next Generation**, after **Undiscovered Country**, which is false. I've read that it's an anthology show, which is not accurate."

"One of the things that is exciting for me is that we are telling a 'Star Trek' story in a modern way. We're telling a 13-chapter story in this first season. It's nice to be able to dig deep into things that would have been breezed past if we were doing episodic and had to contain a story to an episode."

The series has also announced a few writers, chief amongst them former Voyager co-executive producer Joe Menosky. **Trek** author Kirsten Beyer and franchise newcomer Aron Coleite, who previously worked on **Heroes**, have also joined the show.

Virtual Reality TREK

Trek-themed games can be very hit and miss, but Ubisoft's upcoming **Star Trek: Bridge Crew** looks like it could be something special. Unveiled at June's E3 Expo, the online VR game sees players take on the role of bridge officers on the U.S.S. Aegis.

Trek stars Levar Burton, Jeri Ryan, and Karl Urban demonstrated the Abrams-verse set game at E3, and it's set to debut later this year via Oculus Rift, HTC Vive, and PlayStation VR. Until someone





gets round to inventing an actual Holodeck, this is as close as most of us will get to piloting a starship.

Official Podcast Launches

Should you want an informative, humorous, thought-provoking sci-fi themed podcast, we'd like to recommend the (award-winning) STARBURST Radio Show. If somehow, that's not enough for you, you could do worse than checking out the new, official **Star Trek** podcast. Hosted by film critic and writer Jordan Hoffman, the podcast – available on iTunes – began in June, and provides a weekly dose of all things **Trek**, along with an eclectic selection of guests including 'Weird Al' Yankovic and Adam Nimoy.

*"What I'm hoping to create is something that isn't just a press release factory as we get closer to the new show in 2017" Hoffman told STARBURST. "I want a show that 'engages' with all sorts of fans. Fans like me that have been obsessed with minutiae for decades, who read the **Star Trek** books and comics and attend conventions, but also newcomers who like sci-fi and fantasy but are maybe unsure about how best to approach this massive franchise. There has never been a better time to be a **Star Trek** fan and we want to spread the fun".*

Fan Film Guidelines

Trek fan films have had a rough time of it lately, with a lawsuit against one production - **Axanar** - and at least one other advised to shut down. Paramount and CBS have now issued guidelines for future productions, allowing fans to make their own films, safe in the knowledge that they won't get into trouble.

Some of the restrictions they impose have angered fans however. Amongst other things, the guidelines impose a 15-minute runtime limit on films, and restrict them to a maximum of two episodes. They also place limits on crowdfunding, and bar them from using professional cast and crew, especially those previously employed on **Trek** series, or from using '**Star Trek**' in the film's title.

Alex Peters, executive producer of **Axanar**, said, "These guidelines appear to have been tailor-made to shut down all of the major fan productions and stifle fandom". **Renegades** - which features **Trek** alumni including Nichelle Nichols, Terry Farrell, and Tim Russ - has already made alterations, removing all references to **Trek** from the production. Also potentially at risk is the most popular fan series, **Star Trek Continues**, which has produced six full-length episodes to date. It seems that, with a new official series on the way, the guidelines are a timely way to encourage low budget efforts, but limit the more professional offerings which might compete with the studio's output.

CBS action

With the **Star Trek** 50th anniversary approaching fast, CBS Action has announced a campaign to find **The Nation's Favourite Star Trek Episode**. There'll be a Top Twenty countdown, which will include ten episodes on Saturday, September 3rd and ten episodes on Sunday, September 4th, all voted for by fans via the CBS Action website in the preceding month. Voting launches July 22nd.

There will also be special two documentaries from CBS to coincide with the vote: **Star Trek: A Captain's Log** (1994) and **Star Trek: Beyond The Final Frontier** (2007). The Original Series pilot from 1965, **The Cage**, will also be screened as part of the run up to the anniversary.

You can find CBS ACTION on Sky 148, Virgin 192, Freeview 64, and Freesat 137.

STAR TREK



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Garrett Richard Wang is best known for his role as Ensign Harry Kim in STAR TREK: VOYAGER. We caught up on his tour of the UK to find out more about life after the hit show...

STARBURST: How did *Star Trek: Voyager* change your life?

Garrett Wang: It was my first major job, but it was my thirty-second audition! To be a part of something so iconic was a dream come true, especially for a nerd such as myself. I've been a fan of science fiction and fantasy since I was a little boy.

So your first day on the set must have been a pretty big deal?

Caretaker was a thirty-one day shoot to film one episode. Typically, we took seven days. We went on location and really wanted to make everything great. My character was scheduled for thirty days of the thirty-one. Robbie McNeil (Tom Paris) was also very close to that. Kate Mulgrew (Janeway) only had sixteen, the Captain only had sixteen! I filmed the very first scene, with the Doctor and First Officer who both die, and it's the scene where Tom Paris walks in. I remember that I was so nervous - so nervous that I was shaking. The two actors noticed that I wasn't myself, so they said 'We're going to help you here, we're going to do an improvisational exercise. Just go with the flow'. So as he walks in, the camera is over by Tom Paris and this actor goes 'Oh, there he is. We hate that guy' and I'm like 'What? Why do you hate him?' and they're all 'We know him so well, we're going to tell you

what he's going to order from the replicator.' [laughs] They were basically saying all his lines before he was saying them; they'd read the script. I started laughing. That moment got me through that first scene. I thought I was going to pass out from nerves.

What is a day on the convention circuit like for you?

Typically, a day involves a Q&A or panel, those can last for about an hour. Sometimes

there's a moderator, often I'm up on stage alone. I tend to make it more like a stand-up comedy act. I love to make people laugh. I want them to get their money's worth and I don't want to be droning on like a college lecturer; I don't want people falling asleep. I want to keep everyone laughing.

Which other *Trek* actors do you want to work with?

Working with Sir Patrick Stewart would be wonderful.

What the deal with Shatner?

[laughs] I don't know, Shatner is just Shatner, he's The Shat! I don't like when if you're at a convention and he's at a convention and they tell you beforehand you're not allowed to touch him, you have all these rules. Does he even understand that the fans are the reason he is who he is today? If he truly understood that, he'd be embracing every fan. Not just the women. I know when it comes to photo-ops, I'll try to engage the fan. The *Stargate* actor Paul McGillion does some incredible interaction with the fans so I started going above and beyond myself. The actor William Shatner doesn't do that; he uses every convention as his personal ATM. There's nothing wrong with that, but you have to pay homage to the fandom.

What sci-fi project would you love to do?

Big sci-fi comedy. It would be like *Scrubs* or *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. There's been no comedy set on a *Star Trek* set. This would be a comedy involving the Captain, the same nucleus as *Star Trek*, but funny.

What's your next project?

They're still working on the post-production for *Unbelievable!!!!* That's the next thing that will probably come out. It has about twenty-five *Star Trek* alumni. It's a feature film along the lines of *Airplane*, set on a Lunar Base. I've got a few things going.





Why so few projects?

You've got to understand that I took a break from Hollywood for about ten years and I'm just coming back to it now. I left in 2005 because of the issue I had with *Voyager* producers because they wouldn't let me direct. I'm a sci-fi fan and if you talk to most of the actors in the *Star Trek* world, only ten percent are truly fans of the genre, the rest of us are just actors fulfilling a job and they really couldn't give two shits about sci-fi, if I'm honest. I think that threw me for a loop, because it meant I wasn't able to direct.

Part of it was my own fault. I did an interview and the reporter said 'do you have any criticisms of the show?' and I said 'Not that I'm telling you' and then he said it would be off the record. So I said the producers of *Voyager* did not take the risks they should have to make the show better than it already was. Which he then printed. I was referring to Rick Berman's edict that we play down our roles to make the aliens look more real. I thought that was a load of poppycock, but I didn't speak up, it was my first job. To make aliens look real, you just have to cast the right actor. That comment alone was my doom when it came to directing.

So are you still going to direct?

There's an outfit in Calgary who want me to direct, so we'll see.

If you met the young version of yourself, what advice would you give yourself?

Be more patient, take in the moment, and try not to be jealous.

WORDS: ED FORTUNE

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Maestro QU

THE ZELDA SYMPHONY OF THE GODDESSES started four years ago as a way to help celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the classic Nintendo video game series, **THE LEGEND OF ZELDA**. The latest iteration of the tour is entitled **Master Quest**, and includes music and imagery from the entirety of the series, including the latest instalment, **Tri Force Heroes**. We spoke with producer **JASON MICHAEL PAUL** about the history of the touring symphonic presentation.

STARBURST: How did you initially come to

be involved with the *Zelda Symphony*?

Jason Michael Paul: I was the one that Nintendo approached when they were thinking about doing a *Zelda Symphony*. They asked me to produce a segment at the E3 press event as part of the 25th anniversary of *Zelda* showcase they were putting on. They were looking at a lot of ways to celebrate the franchise, and they thought that the most memorable way would be to create a musical from it. That was really the kick-off.

I had been working with Nintendo for some time, going back to *Play: A Video Game Symphony*, so I had forged a relationship with them then, having Koji Kondo perform at my concerts on piano, and participating in that way. So, I had a really good relationship – they had a lot of trust in me – and so, obviously, when the 25th anniversary rolled around, they called me up. The rest of this is kind of just a spin-off of that.

It seems that a lot of these symphonic concerts started out as audio-visual mixtapes, but have really progressed to being more specifically themed.

I disagree. When I first started doing video game concerts with the likes of *Final Fantasy*, I was sticking very true to the format that my colleagues in Japan

and Europe were doing, which was a truly symphonic playback, devoted to a single franchise... Then, what I did was move away from that format and started presenting more [titles] within a program.

I'd say that my greatest success has come in the single-program format – as in, a single brand – because it's an easier idea for people to understand, which is why I think that there's a greater success with something like the *Zelda Symphony* as opposed to *Play: A Video Game Symphony* or *RePlay: A Symphony of Heroes* – it just takes more explaining.

Considering Japan, that makes perfect sense – video game music over there has always been afforded a respect it took time to receive everywhere else.

Well, yeah – it was always regarded as a powerful medium. It's one that the Japanese culture can't ignore. A lot of the cartoons and video games that we've experienced in the United States, they've been celebrated in that country since the beginning. *Mario*, of course. *Dragon Quest* – that's one that the composer, Koichi Sugiyama, had been producing concerts with just the visuals for years and years. He was really the first to do it. That's in Japan. Of course, in Europe, Thomas Böcker was doing the European game concerts. He was producing



Words: Nick Spacek

EST

symphonic concerts.

When I did the first [symphonic concert] in the United States with *Final Fantasy*, I combined it with the video aspect that no-one was really doing at the time, and that's really how I put my fingerprints on it: really combining it in that way, and putting the multimedia aspect to it and trying to sync up the visuals to it; putting a story to it, based on the games at that time. That's pretty much what we did with *Zelda*, except we created a four-movement symphony that is performed as part of the concert.

That's actually one of the things we are really curious about: what are the challenges of syncing such a large group of musicians to a visual medium in a live setting?

Well, the concerts have gotten better and more evolved, because the visuals are more timely. It's evolved quite a bit – we have new technology that allows us to keep in sync. There are wireless click tracks that I've developed, so our technologies and our abilities to make the concert a more compelling and more complete retelling have just really gotten intense.

We perform our music with a 66-piece orchestra and a 24-voice choir, and the charts are done masterfully by A-list Hollywood composers and arrangers. It's just how I treat the scores and my concerts. Given my background – I have a lot of experience doing these concerts, as well as classical concerts that reach beyond video games, like Luciano Pavarotti and the Three Tenors that are very highbrow events. That's what my idea is: I try to create that kind of highbrow event, like when you'd go see a symphony perform a Beethoven or Brahms program.

What's it like taking some of that early music – some of it thirty years old, at this point – and orchestrating it for a symphonic orchestra, versus some of the more modern pieces with their greater complexity?

Obviously, when the music was composed, it wasn't ever intended to

be performed by a choir or conducted. It was always intended to just be the blips and bleeps of a video game on an 8-bit or 16-bit console. So now, as video games have evolved, they've been treated more and more like films and film scores. Now, you have video game companies creating original scores and writing and arranging music.

Nobody was even thinking about it back then, unless you're someone like Koichi Sugiyama, as I said, with *Dragon Quest* or even Nobuo Uematsu – he was surely thinking about these things. It's just been a natural evolution. It's no different than someone taking these scores that were written for orchestras and performing them with rock bands – you're creating different arrangements.

Worldwide dates and tickets for *ZELDA SYMPHONY OF THE GODDESSES MASTER QUEST* can be found at zelda-symphony.com.

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PEPPERPOTS IN TECHNICOLOR

by Fred McNamara

To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the second big-screen (non-canon) DOCTOR WHO film, we take a look back at the fun, entertaining, if garish movie that starred PETER CUSHING and was produced by horror studio AMICUS.

For any millennial Doctor Who fan, *Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.* may come across as such a strange beast. A cinematic remake of an already existing TV serial? 'Why?' They may ask, 'what's the point if we can just watch the original?' In that respect, *Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.* is one of those camp slabs of retro-futuristic sci-fi from the 20th century that encapsulates a pre-digital culture; before the time where every minute detail of every movie's scene is dissected countless times.

But why stop there? Let's look at the film for the reasons it was made, and separate it from its television counterpart. How large a character

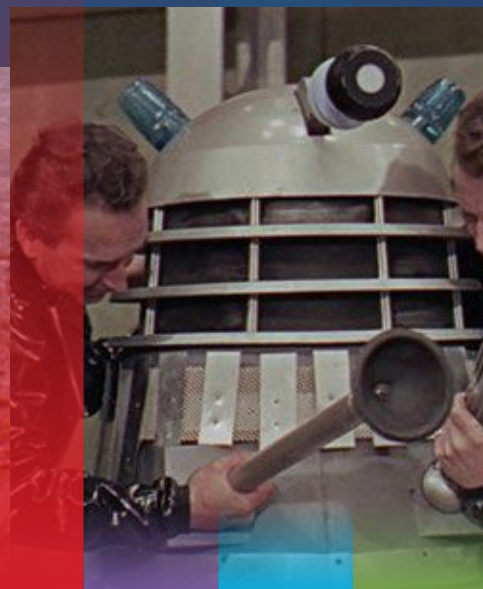
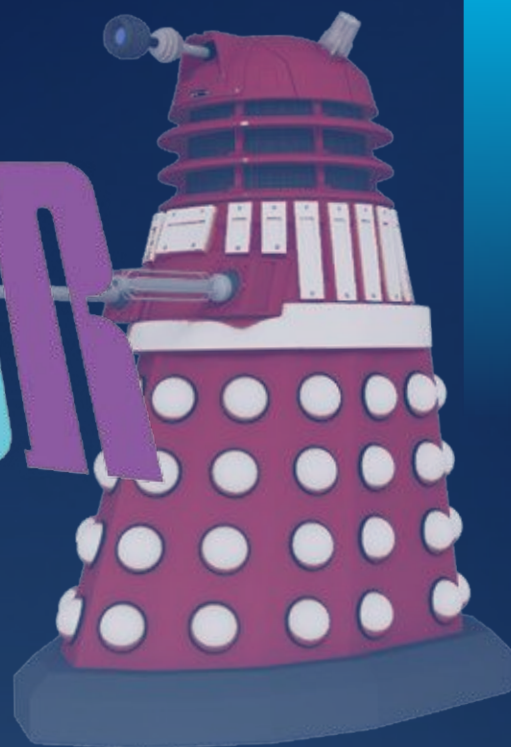
does *Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.* still have when placed against more memorable sci-fi juggernauts of the same era? How does it work as a shameless exploitation of Doctor Who's most popular adversaries? And when the production values of your source material stretch little further than antiquated black-and-white, does Technicolor always mean better?

Picture yourself as a young *Doctor Who* fan in 1966. You may have missed *The Dalek Invasion of Earth*, and you can't just open up your laptop and get cracking with Netflix. You can't even mosey on down to HMV to grab the last DVD copy. You can't even speed on

down to Blockbuster. But you CAN go to the cinema, and not just see it again, but see a new version – in colour!

At least... that's what it may seem. Being produced in colour is really used here only to separate this film from its origins. When you watch the handful of opening scenes from *Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.*, you realise this is going to be an all-together different affair from 1965's *Dr. Who and the Daleks*.

We begin this story in the dank, gloomy streets of night-time London, where hapless policeman Tom Campbell (portrayed by the ever-delightful Bernard Cribbins) fails to stop a robbery at a





jewellery. He stumbles into a police box, inhabited by a whiskery old man and two girls, before lurching back out of the box and back into London. This isn't the London he knows, but in many ways it's exactly the same. We've shifted from night to day, and the whole city has seemingly metamorphosed into a desolate, industrial wasteland. We may have shifted forward in the future, but London remains as uninviting a place as ever.

In some perverse way, Tom is millennial *Doctor Who* fan personified. He is a character out of his depth in everything he does – his profession, his environment, the lot. Likewise, a good chunk of contemporary *Doctor Who* fans may find themselves out of their depth when watching a *Doctor Who* story that doesn't involve overly-spunky companions who are too overly-spunky to play by the Doctor's rules, no heavy-handed references to the Time War, and ultimately, not a great deal of timey-wimey stuff. Perhaps *Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.* has more in common with pulp, mass-produced sci-fi spectacle than *Doctor Who*'s own ethos, but ultimately, it's still an enjoyable affair.

Much of the film's entertainment factor comes when it's held up against the previous movie. On the surface, there

isn't a great deal of change between the two. The story still centres on the Daleks being presented as the omnipotent warmongers everyone knows and loves them to be, only to be easily defeated by the Doctor's... whoops, sorry, we meant to say, Dr. Who's sci-fi hokum that nobody else before his arrival seems to have stumbled upon. There's grand, alien set pieces, the secondary characters don't do a great deal, and the Daleks have a 'gotta catch 'em all' feel about them with their multiple colours and thicker, more robust appearances, evolved from their TV counterparts.

But scratch the surface, and you have a much darker affair than Peter Cushing's début outing as the time-travelling scientist. *Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.* doesn't have the sugar-coated psychedelic flairs of colour that the predecessor had. Much of the film takes place between three main locations – a decaying London, a converted Tube station, and a haphazardly constructed mine in Bedfordshire. All three of these locales evoke a wonderfully grim atmosphere that boosts the movie's themes and plot a great deal, and capture a dystopian world far better than *Dr. Who and the Dalek's Skaro*, where much of the planet has a very obvious studio-set appearance.

This surface-level darkness is really what saves *Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.* from falling into the pit of generic sci-fi cinema from days gone by. The characters may be paper thin, and its plot may be poor man's Quatermass (the Daleks ultimate goal is to... *pilot* the Earth back to Skaro?), but let's not overlook the enthusiasm that young *Doctor Who* fan from 1966 may have felt when seeing *Doctor Who* on the big screen AND in colour for the second time! And therefore, let's not forget the disappointment they may have felt when witnessing this brutal, space-age caper in full throttle, one that doesn't have a great deal of kaleidoscopic juice pouring from every shot that *Dr. Who and the Daleks* pulled off so lovingly.

This contrast between the two films parallels *Thunderbirds*, that other British institution of science fiction, which also received two film adaptations in the 1960s. Where *Doctor Who* chose breezy, family-friendly fun for its first film, things got rougher with the second film. A few months after *Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.* premiered, the hard-edged, tech-heavy *Thunderbirds Are Go* took off, and promptly crash-landed at the box office, thus cementing a far lighter theme akin to *Dr. Who and the Daleks* for its follow-up - *Thunderbird 6*. The Gerry Anderson connection runs deeper when





seven bells out of each other, and no moon-sized space station being obliterated in a galaxy far, far away. Instead, we have a mine. A mine!

The millennial fan may watch this sequence of events dazed and confused, befuddled as to how a kindly old man is able to scupper an entire alien race by essentially pointing upwards, distracting them for a few precious moments whilst he enables the mine's occupants to tackle the Daleks into submission. However, like Tom's heroic actions in the finale, as he shifts the direction of the mine's destination, the modern fan can soon get to grips with this film, and enjoy its rapid pace, its vibrant action, and countless Daleks flooding 20th century London.

Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 A.D. may not be the best we'd ever hope to get out of a Doctor Who film, but it's a perfectly harmless, adventure-without-threat affair, for all its overt bleakness. Maybe the film's biggest crime isn't how it takes so many liberties with classic *Doctor Who* themes and admittedly removes the substance in favour of blitzkrieg action. It may be that we didn't get to see this world of *Doctor Who* fully flourish.

DR. WHO AND THE DALEKS and DALEKS' INVASION EARTH 2150 A.D. are available to buy on Blu-ray.

you sit through the credits and see that Barry Gray provided some electronic flourishes to the soundtrack of the second Who feature, which bare an uncanny resemblance to the freakish eletro-noises he'd deliver for 1967's *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons*...

When placed under the microscope, *Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.* doesn't evolve any further than being a strictly surface-level affair, and once you accept its own limitations, you can start to enjoy it for what it is. The film doesn't add a great deal to the mythos of *Doctor Who*, how can it when it's set in an alternate world? However, it does hint at what another alternate world may have been like. Imagine if both these Dalek movies were huge successes around the world? Would we have gotten more of them? Might Dr. Who and the Daleks and *Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.* ended

up being simply rough prototypes that paved the way for stronger and more original movies? We may never know.

What we're left with are two slices of disposable, retro-tastic sci-fi flicks that are perfect for munching on, and then moving on to more substantial offerings. Curiously, that all-thrills approach has perhaps aged better than history will have you believe. In today's world of blockbuster climaxes that involve some generic downtown metropolis under threat of total extermination from some generic, CGI menace, there's something refreshingly quaint about the climax of the movie.

There's no wormhole generator placed at the top of a skyscraper, no Helicarriers poised to cleanse the weakest human beings on the planet, no transforming alien robots knocking



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WE ARE FINALLY AWAKE!

by Chris Haydon

One of last year's surprise hits, MR. ROBOT returns in JULY for a second season. What made it such a success and what can we expect from the cyber terrorists this time?

"Hello, friend" drones a voice from the blackness. "Hello, friend?" the voice calls again. "That's lame." it adds, "Maybe I should give you a name, but that's a slippery slope. You're only in my head. We have to remember that."

Before audiences have even seen a single cell of USA Network's cybercrime drama-thriller *Mr. Robot*, they are immediately aware that this is something special, something truly unique.

We are currently amidst a 'Golden Age' of television. A period where the small screen is vastly superior to its much larger sibling.

Original, quality programming is flooding every network, viewers are caught between a rock and a hard place when selecting their on-demand service provider, and a cavalcade of flagship performers, writers, directors and producers are dying to sign on the dotted line.

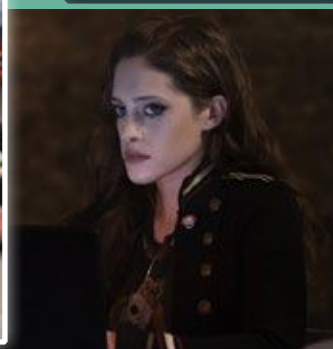
It can be argued that Vince Gilligan's cult hit *Breaking Bad* kick-started this meteoric eruption of premium television in the 2000s - a show which brought cinematic scale and scope not only to the construction and design but to the character palette and narrative arc too. It was symphonic viewing,

a postmodern Shakespearean tragedy. Whilst this particular show may have now run its course, the legacy lives on through a plethora of programming, and Sam Esmail's offering is no exception.

Mr. Robot is so close to perfection it's unsettling. This razored, nihilistic vision of our smartphone-controlled, contactless payment-sculpted society is both repugnant and intoxicating. We reside in a world where we are closer to everyone than ever - with a click of a button or a graze of the thumb, we can be catching up with those thousands of miles away - and yet, we are forever estranged. Locked away and shaded by a blanket of bright LEDs, failing to truly grasp those we wish to reach.

Slaves to technology, drones to corporate consumerism, we are merely a vessel; one used to conform and partake. We work, we earn, we spend, and we die. That's how the show wishes to paint its portrait of reality, and it has created a masterpiece with such aggressive brushstrokes in the process.

In somewhat ironic fashion, *Mr. Robot*'s momentum began to build throughout 2015 thanks to the unfathomable force of the Internet. A clear risk for USA Network, who enjoy success with flashy but ultimately empty shows like *White Collar* and *Burn Notice*,



it rumbled along under the surface quietly before suddenly exploding across social media. What was perhaps destined to become a sleeper hit had little time to rest. Viewers and critics alike took to Twitter and Facebook to discuss and debate the show, probably in the most severe and unprecedented fashion since *Game of Thrones*.

At the midpoint of the ten-episode first season, *Mr. Robot* was the 'must-watch' new TV show of 2015. It was the small screen experience certain to top many lists come winter. It then went on to win the Golden Globe award for Best Television Series - Drama, beating the likes of *Empire*, *Outlander*, and *Narcos*. Fast forward twelve months and we find ourselves on the fringes of returning for a second round; something which cannot come soon enough.

So, what's *Mr. Robot* actually about exactly? Who is that mysterious voice bellowing from the darkness? That would be our protagonist/antihero Elliot Alderson - played with immeasurable brilliance by Rami Malek. He's a security engineer based in New York City who works for cybersecurity company Allsafe. Elliot suffers from debilitating social anxiety disorder and is a clinical depressive. He struggles with basic human interaction, and will mask his face at every opportunity with a hood as black as the night.

Elliot finds his source of personal connectivity through his monitors, hacking friends, acquaintances, passers-by, and even his medical support workers. His infiltration of private documents, emails and more often leads him to act as a cyber-vigilante - locating the city's grimmest and grisliest. In the pilot episode - not long after the introductory monologue - we find him in a coffee shop where he engages in a little chat with the company manager, a man who has a wealth of child pornography



rsociety

WE ARE MALICIOUS AND HOSTILE. WE ARE R

upon his computer. It's fair to say the conversation isn't your typical catch-up over a cappuccino.

Much of the show's story flows from Elliot's clouded and fragmented reality. It is difficult to fathom our surroundings and their validity. His often profound and intimate narration delicately unhinges the complex maps of his mind, but an unhealthy addiction to morphine regularly sends him to states of delusion.

He is soon recruited by a mysterious insurrectionary anarchist known only as Mr. Robot - a towering Christian Slater, who rightfully claimed a Golden Globe for his performance - who along with a gaggle of hacktivists, engages in missions to cripple those who think themselves as Gods. They are *fsociety*, and they operate from the confines of a decrepit arcade on the shores of Coney Island.

The central developing arc of the immaculate first season sees *fsociety* attempting to cancel the world's unplayable debts by taking down one of the largest networking companies in the world, E Corp (which Elliot perfectly perceives as 'Evil Corp'). The venomous brand - a clear creative gut punch at Apple - happens to be Allsafe's biggest and most vital client, and in order to succeed, Elliot must be as invisible in person as he is untraceable online.

Many technology writers and computer programmers have praised Esmail's approach to authentic storytelling, confirming the accuracy of the show's coding, desktop roaming and cybercrime. Finite details such as Elliot's preference of a Linux operating system are reflected across every screen he interacts with, and official keyboard commands, HTTP requests, and SETs are as far as the eye can see.

To add further honesty to its networking backdrop, all ten episodes of Season One are titled and formatted to mirror video files.

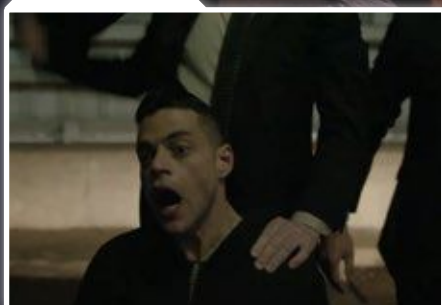
Examples of this include 'eps1.3_da3m0ns.mp4' and 'eps1.9_zer0-day.avi'. Season Two will follow this trend, with the first three episodes being entitled 'ep2.0_unm4sk-pt1.tc', 'ep2.0_unm4sk-pt2.tc', and 'ep2.1_k3rnel-pan1c.ksd'.

The show also benefits from never wasting a frame of footage. We fail to break from the drama as soon as an episode airs for an elongated title sequence; instead a brazen and bold card flashes over often polarising imagery. Both thematically and aesthetically, *Mr. Robot* aims to envelop its spectator entirely.

Season One concluded in shell-shocking, earth-shattering fashion; the type of climax that leaves you slack-jawed and full of questions. Never does the drama treat its audience without intelligence, and rarely does it provide you any information tied tenderly with a bow. It is disarming, progressive and consistently unpredictable. Many viewers are coming to *Mr. Robot* in the wake of the much-anticipated second season, but in order to discuss the forthcoming, some spoilers for the predecessor are inevitable.

Returning to USA Network on July 13th - and just hours later in the United Kingdom for Amazon Prime subscribers (this should help your tireless on-demand debate...), *Mr. Robot* Season 2.0 as it is officially stylised, will deal with the biblical fallout of *fsociety*'s goliath attack against E Corp. Elliot, Mr. Robot, Darlene (the fantastic Carly Chaikin), Romero (Ron Cephas Jones), Trenton (Sunita Mani) and Mobley (Azhar Khan) deleted the planet's financial woes by backdooring the company's servers, penetrating the offsite back provider Steel Mountain, and gaining assistance from the vastly untrustworthy hacking circle the Dark Army to paralyse the corporation's offshore backup in China.

"Season Two gets really dark, really





fast," said showrunner and creator Esmail in a recent interview. "It's even darker [than the first season]. We're still nervous with every episode. We're afraid people are going to hate it and call us out as frauds, or whatever. But we definitely love the attention."

But while the story will go darker - which seems remarkable given the jet-black nature of the debut season - the textural quality and prowess that forms every frame will remain. What makes *Mr. Robot* such a pleasure outside of the marvellous scripting and acting is the art direction, cinematography and set construction. "We definitely go for a cinematic quality, especially in our shots and our framing," Esmail promised. "It lends itself to a really big-screen experience."

Eagle-eyed viewers of the first season will have likely noticed a variety of Easter eggs and references throughout. The vivid connection to David Fincher's *Fight Club* and Darren Aronofsky's *Pi* look set to

remain in 2016, as do the hat tips as Esmail has claimed the show will return with a homage to Martin Scorsese's isolated world-warrior Travis Bickle from neo-noir thunderclap *Taxi Driver*. Take a swift visit to the show's official website and you'll find an extended gallery of all the hidden gems throughout the first ten episodes. Some of them are mind-blowing.

A selection of fresh new faces will be joining the likes of Malek, Slater, Chaikin and the sublime Portia Doubleday (who plays Elliot's childhood friend and co-worker Angela Moss - her developmental story is bound to be a major highlight of Season 2.0) too. Grace Gummer of *The Newsroom* and *American Horror Story: Freak Show* fame will join the main cast as Dominique 'Dom' DiPierro, an FBI agent investigating the Evil Corp hack, whilst regular funnyman Craig Robinson (*The Office*, *Hot Tub Time Machine*) will

predictably drop the jokes to occupy Ray, a man from Elliot's neighbourhood who lends a vital helping hand.

Meanwhile, Brooklyn hip-hop heavyweight Joey Badass will join the team as Leon, a new close friend of Elliot's from his home streets, and Sandrine Holt - who can currently be seen in *Fear the Walking Dead* - will play Evil Corp General Counsel operative Susan Jacobs, who unsuspectingly fits into *fsociety*'s plans.

Esmail himself will direct all ten episodes of the second season, unlike the first in which he only took a seat behind the camera three times. The Egyptian-American is also believed to penning every screenplay too, although this has not been confirmed.

In an era where the level of televisual greatness makes the process of selecting your next series as complex as shopping around for insurance quotes, sometimes it is easy to be overwhelmed. What communities and colleagues online and in life may suggest for you to view is all well and good, but rarely is there something that has the ability and momentum to change the face of the medium. *Mr. Robot* is such a show: in fact, it is more than a television series, it is a statement piece. A beautifully, brilliantly sculptured artwork that has been formed and nurtured through intellect, respect, and thematic excellence.

Much like *Breaking Bad*, this is generational viewing, and it's far time you caught up if you haven't already. Your friend is patiently waiting...

MR. ROBOT SEASON 2.0 is available now on Amazon Prime.





by Andrew Marshall

GIGI SAUL GUERRERO

This month, we meet GIGI SAUL GUERRERO, co-founder of horror house Luchagore Productions and director of some of the most depraved short films you're ever likely to see. With some input from her two main reprobate cohorts, producer Raynor Shima and cinematographer Luke Bramley, she opens up on her work...



STARBURST: When did you first realise that horror was your passion?

Gigi Saul Guerrero: Going into film school, I was sure that I was going to make silly Adam Sandler comedies, but everything changed when I met my best friend Luke Bramley, now co-founder of Luchagore Productions. He was the only horror freak in the class and he re-introduced me to it and I immediately became obsessed. We made our very first short – Dead Crossing, about zombie border guards who eat Mexicans that cross the border to the USA – and from that moment on, having blood on set was the most fun I ever had! Best part of all was the reactions of friends and family: they would scream, squirm and get absolutely grossed out! I knew horror was for me; there is no other genre that makes an audience react in so many ways and with all kinds of emotions. That to me makes everything worth it.

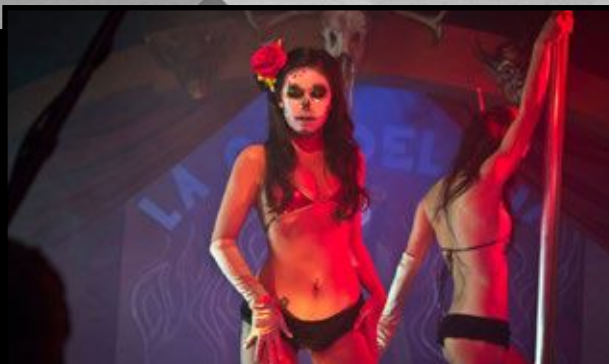
Raynor Shima: When I was the tender young age of five, my dad let me watch Aliens for the first time (Mom was thoroughly unimpressed). I was scarred for a while and could not watch horror, until I sucked it up and started watching the old classics such as The Exorcist, The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, The Evil Dead, and so on. I knew then I wanted to get into making horror films, to recreate what I felt, and what most people feel when they see a great horror movie. They leave an everlasting impression and message, whether it's super-violent, gory, scary, or just outright weird.

Luke Bramley: I got into horror at a fairly young age, when my older sister and I would rent VHS movies in the late 80s that would freak us out. Classic films such as The Shining, A Nightmare On Elm Street, and The Exorcist left a lasting impression on me and would keep me up at night, but I was fascinated with them, and as I got older and into filmmaking, I wanted to recreate this feeling in movies and scare/gross out other people.

Did you always want to direct?

GSG: Since I was a little girl, I've had a weird obsession with watching movies and pointing out continuity mistakes, especially with Disney's animated features. I always had curiosity about films but never really got into it since I started out wanting to be an Olympic athlete. I could go on and on about all the sports I took part in, but I started getting into theatre and realised how much I loved acting and performing. Long story short, I got my first acting agent which led to my first commercial, I saw all the cameras and lights and BAM!!! – my mind changed completely. I had to know more about what happens behind the camera. I soon realised this is what I was meant to do.

DIA DE LOS MUERTOS



EL MATADOR

You've collected numerous comparisons to Robert Rodriguez, with such provisos as '...with boobs', '...in a miniskirt', '...on drugs', or '...but actually Mexican'. How much of an influence would you say he has actually been, and who else do you take inspiration from?

GSG: Rodriguez is by far my first true inspiration and idol when I started getting into filmmaking. I remember reading his book [Rebel Without a Crew, which details the fundraising, production and sale of his debut feature *El Mariachi*], watching all his interviews and panels thinking, 'Holy shit! This guy is amazing at what he does.' His first few films really inspired me because of his attitude towards filmmaking. 'Just keep making shit,' he would always say. Now with more experience of the kinds of films I want to make, I take a lot of my inspiration from Quentin Tarantino, Rob Zombie and Eli Roth. But some of my true heroes are the Three Amigos: Guillermo del Toro, Alfonso Cuarón, and Alejandro González Iñárritu.

Your short *M is For Matador* was entered into the open contest for *The ABCs of Death 2*, and although it didn't win, it was part of the runner up compilation *The ABCs of Death 1.5*. How much did this help with getting you noticed?

RS: I think doing any film contest, whether you win or lose, will garner you some

new fans, as well as new contacts. We got to meet quite a few people who had their films in the contest, and started talking about projects and getting great feedback on our work. This led to us meeting Lex Ortega, who was developing an all-Mexican horror anthology titled *México Bárbaro* and wanted us to be a part of it. It has opened the doors for us greatly in Latin America, as well as Lex and his amazing sound design team at LSD Studios doing our films *El Gigante*, *Feliz Cumpleaños*, and *Madre de Dios*. People always seem to remember us from *The ABCs of Death* competition and have continued to follow our success, since then it has been a great pleasure to see ourselves grow with self promoting and keeping ourselves alive on social media. Overall, I think it has helped us greatly!

GSG: Taking part in *México Bárbaro* was truly a blessing. I was able to meet other directors from Mexico, which I'd never had the chance of doing before since I moved to Canada at such a young age. I really felt part of something special coming from my own country. Our segment *Día de los Muertos* was an idea I had in my head for a couple years before taking part of the anthology. I love revenge stories!

Many of your films feature a mixture of visceral gore, black humour and unabashed sexiness. Does it take a conscious effort to maintain a balance

between these various aspects, or does it come naturally?

GSG: Honestly, I think it comes naturally. Every filmmaker has a certain style that features what they like best in film. What I really like about our style is that we're not afraid to touch important subject matters and get people talking, yet at the same time give it a unique twist and make it entertaining. However, we still keep a balance of having a good story to support so much gore and violence.

Several of your shorts feature women either in a position of dominance or fighting back against male oppressors. Is this something important to you to portray?

GSG: To me, it's more important to portray the same level of strength both genders have. Yes, many of my films do have a female empowerment theme, but that's because it suits the story in that moment. When you see our other films *El Gigante* and *Madre de Dios*, there isn't a theme about female revenge or anything near that. In these two films, you have a man suffering in a wrestling ring and a tied-up woman suffering in a cult ritual, yet both films portray how humans in general can be vulnerable regardless of their gender.

It's fair to say that the film industry is rife

EL GIGANTE



with more than its share of misogyny. Given how you look and the assumptions about you people may subsequently make, have you encountered any obstacles that might otherwise have been absent?

GSG: I think obstacles are present no matter if you're a woman or a man. Yes, it's hard to be a woman in a male-dominated industry, but it can also be to my advantage because I have a different point of view. A career in the film industry – or really any industry at a high level – is always hard and it always has its obstacles; nothing worth doing in this life is going to be easy. That's why if it's your passion, it makes all the difference to fight for what you want and believe, no matter what comes your way. So in my case, being a young girl in film will be difficult, but that just means I must work a little harder to prove myself.

How did the Luchagore team come together and how do you operate as one?

LB: I met Gigi in film school and early on we started collaborating together due to our love of horror. We seemed to share the same vision and goals, and during graduation we met Raynor, who was looking to team up with local filmmakers. Since we all have the same vision and goals it is easy to operate as a team. We all share different aspects of the workload, and specialise in different departments, which allows us to lean on each other for support as we push ourselves to be the best that we can be

and create a product that we believe our fans will love.

Your grindhouse style of directing has found a great match in the mesmerisingly repulsive writing of Shane McKenzie (El Gigante, TESTEmment). How did you encounter each other?

GSG: Thank you! Working with Shane has been a match made in heaven! He was the missing piece of the Luchagore team. Meeting Shane wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for the amazingly talented John Skipp who saw Dead Crossing at a festival in L.A. and told us we needed to meet him. From there Shane sent us his novel [Muerte Con Carne] and we sent him our work and the rest is history!

How was the experience of using Kickstarter to fund El Gigante and would you use crowdfunding again?

LB: The experience with using Kickstarter was actually very positive. I was a little worried at first about asking people for money, because our earlier projects were mainly self-funded, and we tried using crowdfunding once before but failed miserably. This time around, our approach was to engage our fanbase and make them feel like they were a part of this project, and we were amazed with the support and positive feedback

we received once our campaign was finished. This platform of funding is fantastic for independent filmmakers, and I would definitely do it again!

El Gigante shares a theme of illegal immigration with your first short Dead Crossing. Is this coincidental or is it a subject you're conscious of?

GSG: I wouldn't call it a coincidence. Illegal crossing is a topic that is still happening in many places today, and I think it's important to be aware of the true brutalities that happen in our world and explore them in film. When you think about it, horror films are a way to escape our own fears, and I like to give real situations a new twist.

El Gigante is in the process of being extended into a full-length feature. What can we expect from the finished article?

GSG: After all the success the El Gigante short film is having around the world we couldn't be more excited about the feature. The script absolutely rocks! It's so gritty, dirty and I promise the audience will feel like taking a shower after watching. Working on the script with the author of the novel, Shane McKenzie, really made a difference. We are truly giving horror fans a great horror flick with so much gore and a unique story with characters that will not be forgotten. El Gigante is the villain we

A LUCHAGORE CHRISTMAS



A LUCHAGORE EASTER



have been waiting for, and his kills will be glorious in that wrestling ring.

What advice do you have for anyone looking to follow a filmmaking path?

RS: For anyone interested in pursuing a career in film, know that success does not happen overnight. We have been perfecting our craft for almost five years now; self-promoting, networking, and attending as many festivals/markets as we can, just to get our names out there. Ultimately, it will come down to your film, and you must become attached to it like it's your baby. You must nourish it and always be there to continually support its growth. The key to that is working with a super-talented team of like-minded people who will help you get the end result you are looking for, and that, for us, is something that we love about our amazing crew, who have been with us since the beginning. We believe in everybody's vision with the simple goal of sharing the same idea that's going to enhance the film to its full potential. You must respect your crew's talents and utilise them so your vision comes to life the way you want. Treat others as you'd like to be treated, and that will carry on with you for the rest of your life and career.

What do you have planned beyond El Gigante?

GSG: The El Gigante feature is our main focus, and hopefully more features after that one. But as of right now we have BIG PLANS. We can't share yet what we have in store but keep your eyes peeled for Luchagore Productions.

You can follow Gigi on Twitter @HorrorGuerrero and find out more about Luchagore's movies on facebook.com/luchagoreproductions and their official website luchagoreproductions.com.





EL GIGANTE (SHORT)

**CERT: TBC / DIRECTOR: GIGI SAUL GUERRERO /
SCREENPLAY: SHANE MCKENZIE / STARRING: EDWIN
PEREZ, DAVID FORTS, MATHIAS RETAMAL, NISREEN SLIM,
ARLINA RODRIGUEZ / RELEASE DATE: TBC**

Like thousands of desperate Mexicans, all Armando wants is to start a new life in America. After a coyote fleeces him to take his wife and daughter over the border, he is left with no money to pay for his own passage. Lost in the desolation of the desert borderlands, what appears to be salvation ends up an agonising mauling at the hands of the monstrous luchador El Gigante.

Scripted by pulp horror gore purveyor Shane McKenzie, *El Gigante* is a short film adapted from the first chapter of his novel *Muerte Con Carne*. McKenzie's books are written with the kind of unflinching and self-aware depravity that laughs in the face of Shaun Hutson, and are a perfect match for the grisly grindhouse stylings of Gigi Saul Guerrero's directorial vision.

The film shifts into a POV shot as Armando awakes, making us as disorientated and disconcerted as he is, and we soon almost wish he'd never come to his senses. A crude luchador mask consisting of a patchwork hood of filthy burlap is stitched to his face; human skulls top the wrestling ring's posts, traces of rotting flesh still clinging to them as they crawl with greasy maggots; patches of blood dried into various states of discolouration stain the canvas; and the grimy backroom stench of the windowless makeshift auditorium practically permeates the screen.

True to his name, *El Gigante* is a colossal, barrel-chested monstrosity of a man, and with his wide animalistic glare, gnashing rictus and heavy breathing one step short of growling, he barely seems human, while other members of the attendant voyeuristic family such as an opaque-eyed matriarch and a couple of feral kids laughing with gleeful sadism provide a balance of sinister menace to the eponymous wrestler's terrifying brutality.

Unlike many of Guerrero's other shorts, there's not any alluring sexiness juxtaposing the gruesome violence, unless you count an inbred-looking young woman playing with herself through her dress while Gigante tosses Armando around like a human sackdoll, the sound of his bones being mashed into splintered pulps resonating with sickening crunches.

Gigante's rudimentary championship belt crushed with trophies from previous victims provides an unsettling indicator that the clan of maniacs have been holding these torturous bouts for some time, and one shot even invites a final sucker punch of despair before it's all over.

Finally, the credit sequence where we discover exactly what gets done with Gigante's victims (which the title of the novel gives a clue towards), while lacking the violence of the rest of the film, is in its own way the most nauseating part of it. *El Gigante* invites strong comparisons to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, but is distinctive enough to transcend any accusations of cheap imitation. Guerrero is without a doubt a name to watch.



THE LIFE OF MEL

Words: Tony Jones



On November 1st, 1986, Melanie Jane Bush, MSc (Hons), of Pease Pottage, mostly known as Mel, appeared from nowhere as a companion to the sixth incarnation of the Doctor in the *Terror of the Vervoids* segment of *Trial of a Time Lord*. If that wasn't a difficult enough beginning, she survived a handful of adventures, a dodgy regeneration, and the Rani, and then vanished at the end of *Dragonfire* with galactic rogue Sabalom Glitz on December 7th, 1987. Mel passed into other media as the show itself faded away, and various 'what happened next and how did she meet the Doctor' ideas have been explored.

Cue the twenty-first century and, in a year when many Big Finish ranges are offering new jumping-on points, Melanie Bush is back on audio for a trilogy with the Seventh Doctor. The trilogy kicks off with Matt Fitton's *A Life of Crime*, and this time an older Mel comes back into contact with Ace and the Doctor. A simple, yet brilliant idea. This may not be Mel's travels with Glitz, but it does give yet another angle on Mel for fans to enjoy.

Bonnie Langford has reprised Mel many times for Big Finish. She first appeared all the way back in the 2000 story *The Fires of Vulcan*; since then she has been in seventeen different main range stories, the most recent until now being *Terror of the Sontarans* in 2015. Although both these stories also feature the Sylvester McCoy Doctor, she has had plenty of adventures with Colin Baker, including the 2015 special boxset *The Sixth Doctor: The Last Adventure*. Here, Colin finally got his regeneration story and marked the passing of his incarnation after a delay of almost twenty-nine years. Although there was a regeneration scene at the start of *Time and The Rani*, Sylvester himself donned a wig and stood in for Colin.

Back to Mel herself. Like all characters, Mel has been able to express herself on audio in ways she wasn't able to back in the '80s. It's important to remember she joined the show aged 22. She'd been a child star in the early '70s and most viewers would have known her as the character Violet Elizabeth Bott in the show *Just William*, broadcast in



1976-77. Her character was known for the line "I'll thcream and thcream and thcream 'till I'm thick". While Mel may not have been known only for screaming, this is not the best way for a character to start her time on the show.

Mel has now appeared in more audios than she ever did TV stories. Bonnie has had plenty of opportunity to show her range with the character, and a good case in point is the 2003 story *He Jests at Scars*. This is one of the Big Finish *Unbound* range - a collection of titles set in alternate versions of *Doctor Who* canon (and about to be revisited by Bernice Summerfield in August this year, but that's another story...). In Gary Russell's story, Michael Jayston returned as the Valeyard where the Valeyard had won. This is a dark story and Bonnie

Langford's portrayal of a less sugar-coated Mel is gripping and a far cry from her prior TV performances.

As a whole, the Big Finish main range stories focus on Mel's intelligence and kind nature. They've even touched upon how she first met the Doctor. In the various spin-off media, Mel met the Doctor in Brighton. In the 2013 Matt Fitton story *The Wrong Doctors*, we are treated to not one but two versions of both Mel and the Doctor as we learn just what happened both when the Sixth dropped Mel back in her timeline (after *Trial of a Time Lord*) and then later on dropped back to meet her so she could come on board the TARDIS. This is one of the more complex plots, but Matt Fitton assures STARBURST readers he has the whole story mapped out on a special sheet of five-dimensional paper he keeps for such occasions.

Fortunately, not all stories need degrees in trans-temporal physics (we've left ours at the dry cleaners in the Orion Nebula), and Mel has proven herself to be as capable a companion as any of the others Big Finish has brought to our ears in encounters with Daleks, mind-control, a galactic version of the Eurovision Song Contest, Davros and much else besides. With the forthcoming trilogy, she joins the Doctor and Ace to deal with the benefits of retiring from a life of crime, the Spanish Civil War, and a maker of demons.

We can't wait!



DOCTOR WHO - A LIFE OF CRIME is released by BIG FINISH at the end of July.





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REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG
SCREEN GENRE
RELEASES REVIEWED
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INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: ROLAND EMMERICH / SCREENPLAY: ROLAND EMMERICH, DEAN DEVLIN, NICHOLAS WRIGHT, JAMES A. WOODS, JAMES VANDERBILT / STARRING: LIAM HEMSWORTH, JEFF GOLDBLUM, JESSIE USHER, MAIKA MONROE, BILL PULLMAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Hard to believe it has been twenty years since aliens invaded, infamously destroying the White House, in a scene that has since become a classic cinematic snapshot. Since the sci-fi action hit *Independence Day*, Roland Emmerich has become known for such money shot obliteration (albeit he has helmed other more measured works too). Very much of the ethos that a simple car crash here or explosion there will not suffice, Emmerich has taken pride in devastation on the biggest possible scale; think a battle between aliens and football hooligans - actually, that's not a bad idea for a film - and you have merely half the chaos offered by a Roland Emmerich disaster movie. So, with two decades passing and the original film being somewhat re-evaluated as a trendsetter for grand action blockbusters, we return to the war between man and the large-shipped, tentacled, extraterrestrials, but was it worth the wait? "Uh, Yeah".

Set twenty years, practically to the day, after the first film, this sequel sees a united and more advanced humanity, that has integrated the alien technology into everyday life and progressed

further and quicker in the process. The story picks up with ESD (Earth Space Defense) moon base pilot Jake (Liam Hemsworth) and his pal Charlie (Travis Trope), among the many other pilots and crew, preparing for *Independence Day* celebrations. As ace pilot and now grown-up stepson of Steven Hiller (Will Smith in the first film), and not a big fan of Jake, Dylan Dubrow-Hiller (Jessie Usher) leads the pilots in the festivities. However, down on Earth, David Levinson (Jeff Goldblum) is visiting a warlord's clan, who take refuge within an old alien ship that landed back in '96, and comes across worrying signs that the aliens may not be done with us. No sooner than he does, alarm bells start ringing as mankind finds itself under a second attack from a far larger and seemingly insurmountable wave of these alien invaders.

If you were expecting a sequel that delves into an intellectually stimulating narrative or tackles heavy subjects, then what the hell is wrong with you?! This sequel, in every possible sense, is bigger and sillier and thus impossible to resist. The story, complete with many links and references to the first film, re-assembles a good portion

of the cast, alongside some fresh blood, and while it goes off the rails in certain parts, it is all like one big cheesy digital pizza, occasionally messy but delicious and easy to consume. From the almost laughably large alien invasion sequence, packed to the gills with outstanding effects (the film sadly has more CGI than practical this time, though it is understandable why), to the closing assault on the movie's big (and we mean BIG) baddie (riffing on *Aliens* slightly), *Resurgence* is absurdly enjoyable. In this day and age





of unnecessary sequels or reboots it is gratifying to see one that surprises you, as it justifies its existence early and often and just... works.

Many are always moaning about the idiocy of blockbusters, but a bit of dunderheadedness is not always a bad thing when the film is charismatic and knowing with it. And *Resurgence* is just that, bolting along as fast as it can, so it can get to the airborne heroism, proudly brave men and women making speeches, and ass-kicking alien action, with some loud 'n' proud scoring (from Harald Kloser and Thomas Wanker... gee, school must have been rough for him) that veers ever so near to *Star Wars* at points. The film expands what was a one movie deal into a mythos building sci-fi splurge, creating a backstory for its alien menace and, while clichés fly about here there and everywhere, Emmerich knows what he is doing, as do the co-screenwriters, all four (yes, four) of whom are in tune with his direct and destructive tastes.

The characters engulf the movie, with many emerging as narrative tragedy fodder and others as just occasional faces amidst the building-crumbling, base-blasting fracas. However, the actors exude charm, with Liam Hemsworth clearly trying to fill the Will Smith mantle (they even make a comment on the infamous 'welcome to Earth' punch) and mostly succeeding, as he attempts to get back to his fiancé Patricia Whitmore (a slightly underused but still effective Maika Monroe) - daughter of former president Thomas J. Whitmore (a returning bearded Bill Pullman). Jessie Usher is given the less interesting part as the straight-laced ace fighter pilot hero but makes the most of it. A host of original cast members make worthwhile - if some short lived - appearances, from Pullman to Vivica A. Fox and more, in a commendable effort of gathering the crux (Smith aside) of the original cast back for more. Though the standouts are Jeff Goldblum (obviously) in full-on

delightfully droll mode ("they love to get the landmarks") and a very funny Brent Spiner (bafflingly back as the messy barnetted Dr. Brakish Okun, which is explained in the most stupidly satisfying of ways). Travis Trope and the always-reliable William Fichtner offer other entertaining performances in this overcrowded big budget blast.

The odd worthwhile social comments are offered, in a strong female president - played by Sela Ward - and a homosexual male relationship (which is only suggested but still a welcome sign of progress in the often behind the times output of mainstream cinema) but those aside, this is otherwise a straight shooting piece of dumb fun. Many characters are slight, the film is often overly grandiose, the script is jammed with well-worn tropes and it all often becomes a special effects-loaded extravaganza. However, what separates this film from being vanquished by these flaws is its smile-inducing determination to use them as positives rather than negatives. Emmerich's film is stupid and entertaining and sometimes stupidly entertaining but, unlike his misfires *10,000 BC* and *Godzilla*, it realises this fact and embraces it as a facet of the movie's character, taking its popcorn munching entertainment to ridiculous levels in terms of grand scale and enjoyment.

Independence Day: Resurgence is what you expect in a follow up to *Independence Day*; it is a big, barmy, blockbusting ball that is nothing but sci-fi spectacle fun and that is all it ever wanted to be. "Now that's what I call a Close Encounter."

JACK BOTTOMLEY



EXPECTED ★★★★★★★ 6

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★ 8



THE SECRET LIFE OF PETS

CERT: U / DIRECTORS: CHRIS RENAUD, YARROW CHENEY / SCREENPLAY: BRIAN LYNCH, CINCO PAUL, KEN DAURIO / STARRING: LOUIS C.K, KEVIN HART, STEVE COOGAN, ERIC STONESTREET / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

As animation techniques improve, it can only be a matter of time before an animated film will outperform a live-action film in the awards stakes, with people focusing less on how it was made and more on what the story being told is.

The Secret Life of Pets has the misfortune or mistiming

of being released two months after Disney's excellent Zootropolis as it shares the same kind of context and style. It also bears more than a passing resemblance to the Dreamworks/Aardman production Flushed Away from about a decade ago.

However, it still provides

a sufficiently entertaining diversion, but doesn't quite hit the heights of the Illumination team's Despicable Me or Minions films (however, there is a bonus before the film of a Minions short in the tradition of the Pixar presentations, called Mower Minions). That said, this film is a little more kiddie-friendly than Zootropolis, as the film-makers focus a bit more on the mannerisms and attributes of the pets on show.

Terrier Max lives high on the hog with his lady owner in a New York apartment block, but gets more than he bargained for when she brings home a mongrel called Jake from the dog pound. Like Woody and Buzz in the first Toy Story, you can predict that things aren't quite going to be easy between Max and Jake at the outset, and they find themselves on the street where, after losing their collars, they're captured by animal control and placed in the van.

It isn't long before a hip-hopping rabbit by the name of Snowball springs them from

the van and takes them under this wing, with the view of adopting them into his gang, a reality that Max and Jake aren't too keen on...

As with all inventive animation, there are plenty of pop culture references (in the case of this film, The Birds is seen on a poster in one of the apartments and the film pays homage to The Lost World - Jurassic Park in one action sequence). New York is impeccably rendered from the outset in the animation, a relief to those who have visited the Big Apple, and it is a faultless visual experience.

We would have rated the film higher, but our biggest criticism of the film is its over-familiarity and reliance on the standard animation movie template, which has been done to better effect in recent offerings like Inside Out and the aforementioned Zootropolis.

JOHN HIGGINS

EXPECTED ++++++++ 8

ACTUAL ++++++++ 7



THE NEON DEMON

CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: NICOLAS WINDING REFN / SCREENPLAY: NICOLAS WINDING REFN, MARY LAWS, POLLY STENHAM / STARRING: BELLA HEATHCOTE, ELLE FANNING, KEANU REEVES / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

News reports have gleefully spewed the fact that Nicholas Winding Refn's latest film The Neon Demon was booed at screenings during this year's Cannes film festival. The Cannes audience will boo anything except free drinks, so these reports are to be taken with a hefty dose of salt. Refn has turned his unique eye on to the fashion industry with a frustrating but interesting and unique film.

Jesse (Elle Fanning), a young aspiring model, moves to the big city to find her fame and fortune. There she meets people who are beguiled by her beauty

and also those who are jealous.

Elle Fanning, all big doe eyes and alabaster skin, is a perfect fit as the young and innocent model. Dressed in light and pastel-coloured floaty dresses, she stands out against the darkly coloured costumes of those around her. All the sets make it feel like she is trapped and alone and the recurring use of mirrors make her always feel watched. Jesse herself says that she used to imagine the moon was a big eye looking down on her. The Neon Demon explores the notion of being watched and judged, as all the models are scrutinised

by each other, with sideways sneering looks, as well as by potential clients. Success and failure both come quickly with a terse word, withered look, or pointed finger. Jesse is a natural, untainted beauty and this opens her up to vicious, jealous attacks as well as admiration and adoration.

The Neon Demon is supposed to be Nicholas Winding Refn's horror movie. Indeed, he himself says that it is a horror movie for sixteen-year-old girls. Certainly, there are horror elements to it, but we don't think it can ever rightly be called a horror film. It is surprisingly funny throughout; look out for Alessandro Nivola as the arrogant fashion designer who's enchanted by Jesse and who is hilarious in all of his screen time. The film even takes a turn to B-movie territory towards the end that invites you to laugh at its over the top nature.

Amongst the glorious visuals and wonderful synth soundtrack from frequent collaborator Cliff Martinez, is Refn's penchant for shock, whether it be through violence or sexuality, in this case including a scene of necrophilia. Refn is a director who controls carefully and doesn't compromise his vision. His characters often

take long unnatural pauses between lines, even pausing within them. Refn doesn't hurry himself, instead letting the camera hold for longer than you would expect. This creates quite a languid pace and, over the course of two hours, makes the film feel bloated and dragging, not helped by the fact that it struggles to feel like it's going anywhere or leading up to anything. You'll feel like you're spending a lot of time just looking at Elle Fanning's unmoving face.

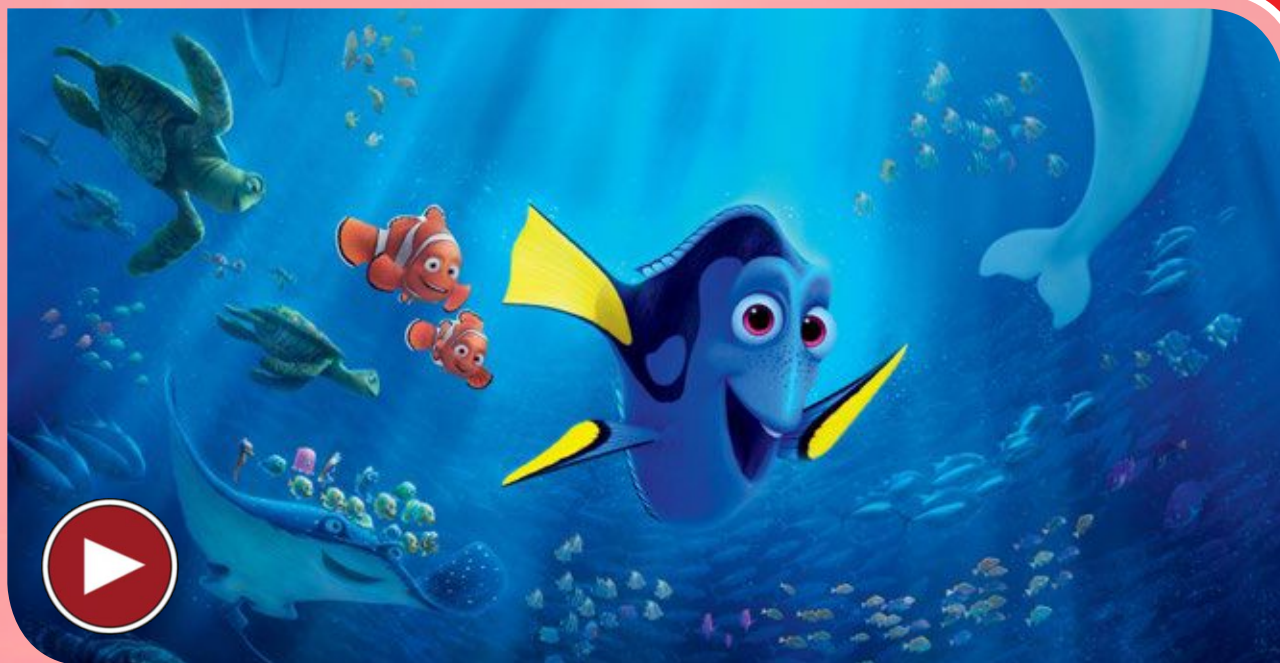
Refn's films are always going to be divisive and The Neon Demon isn't any different. He doesn't make concessions nor attempt to appeal to the masses, and really, why should he? He is an auteur making what he wants. You may be entranced and pulled in to his stylised worlds or bored and pushed away but at least he will give you something to talk about.

The Neon Demon is wonderful looking, has a great soundtrack and has some interesting ideas floating around but it tries your patience with its sluggish pace and lack of drive.

COURTNEY BUTTON

EXPECTED ++++++++ 8

ACTUAL ++++++++ 6



FINDING DORY

CERT: U / DIRECTOR: ANDREW STANTON, ANGUS MACLANE / SCREENPLAY: ANDREW STANTON, VICTORIA STROUSE, BOB PETERSON / STARRING: ELLEN DEGENERES, ALBERT BROOKS, HAYDEN ROLENCE, ED O'NEILL, KAITLIN OLSON, TY BURRELL, DIANE KEATON, EUGENE LEVY / RELEASE DATE: JULY 29TH

Picking up a year after the end of Finding Nemo, a chance comment knocks loose a flash of memory and sees Dory remember her parents as well as a clue to where they might be found. Embarking on an expedition to find them with Marlin and Nemo, they become separated and she ends up at the sealife centre where she was born. Enlisting the aid of grouchy octopus Hank, short-sighted whale Destiny and neurotic beluga Bailey, she searches the complex for her parents while Marlin and Nemo look for her.

Finding Dory begins with an opening sequence as heartbreaking as the first few minutes of Finding Nemo that sees a terrified young Dory trying to find her way home, and her ceaseless search ultimately weaves into her initial entrance in the previous film. While it acknowledges its predecessor with a few references and familiar cameos from the likes of Mr Ray, Crush the sea turtle, and the 'Mine! Mine! Mine!' seagulls – as a well as a post-credits scene from others you thought had been forgotten about – Finding Dory is very much its own story and in no way seeks to capitalise on the success of its predecessor.

Flashbacks abound as Dory remembers more and more about her childhood, which also serve to shape her parents into actual characters and not just the nebulous goal of her search. Their love and affection for baby Dory (who, at the risk of reactionary hyperbole, might actually be the most adorable Pixar creation yet) clearly shaped the development of the considerate individual she grew into, and never let her believe for a moment that her unreliable memory is a handicap or something she should be embarrassed about.

While Dory's life might be perceived as being hamstrung by her forgetfulness, this in no way diminishes her worth or capability. She lives from one moment to the next, her every thought and decision taken on instantaneous instinct. Even after losing Marlin and Nemo, it never crosses her mind that without their help she should just give up, and it's her perpetual upbeat optimism that soon wins over the new allies in her quest. Indeed, at one point, Marlin comes to realise that 'What would Dory do?' is not always as reckless and inadvisable a course of action as he had assumed.

As much as the plot features Marlin and Nemo searching for Dory, the title more specifically refers to the personal journey Dory undergoes that allows her to fully come to terms with herself. Her feeling the need to be constantly contrite for the inconvenience her memory problems causes for others (count the number of times she says "I'm sorry" as the film progresses) is a response she has evidently developed over the years after realising how others generally react to her. However, while her memory might make some interactions with her repetitive or frustrating, it's a part of who she is, and as such is something for which she should not be expected to apologise. Her ultimate acceptance of this is as much a necessary part of becoming whole as a person (or rather fish) as being reunited with her parents.

Pixar's deft touches to entertain adults are again evident in force (a wonderful riff on Labyrinth's 'Go back!' is a particular standout) and even throwaway encounters that last for mere moments, such as a lovesick clam or a migrating group of rays singing a sea shanty, are afforded as much detail and consideration as any moment

of the main plot. The company has never been one to spare the emotions of its viewers, and no matter what your age you'll find certain moments tugging on your heartstrings and starting to get you a little misty-eyed, especially at more than one turn of events when despair sets in after no apparent way out is evident. While you might second-guess some developments due to another outcome running counter to Pixar's dramatic sensibilities or devious sense of humour, they are insignificant when held against the seamless and enthralling flow of the story.

A worthy follow-up to a modern classic, Finding Dory is an enchanting tale that never once falls like an unnecessary retread, and while not quite surpassing its predecessor, it at least equals it. And when the pedigree you're talking about is this high, that's quite an achievement.

ANDREW MARSHALL

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★ 9

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★ 9



REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME
VIDEO RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



FROM DUSK TILL DAWN: SEASON 2

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: ROBERT RODRIGEZ, VARIOUS / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: DJ COTRONA, ZANE HOLTZ, ELIZA GONZÁLEZ, JESSE GARCIA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

If you thought the first season felt like a long drawn-out version of the 1996 cult classic, then that won't be such a problem here, with this second season going outside of the original film's story, expanding on the mythology and focusing on an original narrative. However, that doesn't necessarily mean it's all plain sailing; in fact, this season ends up being something of a muddled disappointment after the semi-promising first. This new ten-episode run has so much going on with varying storylines and multitudes of characters, as well as trying its best to be fresh and original and just ends up feeling lacking because of it.

It's certainly much more interesting this time round now that it doesn't feel like a rehash of the original film and it delivers some fascinating new storylines for our collection of antiheroes: Santánico Pandemonium is now free from the confines of the Titty Twister thanks to a newly converted Richie Gecko and is planning on using him as a means of exacting her big revenge scheme, Seth Gecko is trying to find a way back in the game, Kate Fuller is trying to save her brother Scott after he was converted into a culebra in the last season, and Freddie Gonzalez is summoned once again to deal with the culebra menace as he's trying to lead a normal life. These storylines sound promising, but by the time

they reach their end, they sort of all fall flat.

Given the fact that Scott's become something of a bad guy, it's hard to feel involved in his and Kate's storyline, especially given how repetitively Kate keeps being undecided as to whether or not she can save him. Freddie Gonzalez ultimately feels as though he's just along for the ride, while Richie and Seth's stories are solid, if uninspired; plus even after all this time, it's still hard to be invested in them seeing as they are both ultimately immature jerks. Also, despite the last season having a clear main antagonist in Carlos Madrigal, this series can't decide who its ultimate antagonist is, flopping back and forth between Carlos and new big bad Lord Amancio Malvado, so it all ends up being a wash in the end. Oh, and 'Sex Machine' is completely wasted here this time round.

That being said, this series is ultimately held strong thanks to Eiza González's Santánico and her big revenge storyline. The fact that Santánico has been given a hero's pursuit this series feels like a real step forward with the Vampire Queen talking about abandoning her former self ("shedding old skin"), which was telling as the series went on. Just like before, Eiza González is really becoming the true standout of the entire show, especially

now that she's going the full hero route. González's sultry beauty and overall sheer magnetic presence is one of the show's real advantages and whenever she comes into play, she lights up the screen, despite the fact that she surely suffers whenever she's paired up with Zane Holtz's monotone Richie. Also, both Wilmer Valderrama and Esai Morales are superbly chilling and menacing as the two main villains, and Danny Trejo as "the Regulator" is still bad as ever, despite not being given much to do.

The idea of doing a From Dusk Till Dawn TV series was an interesting one at first, but now, it sort of feels like a zombie: it isn't dead, but that doesn't mean it's alive. Eiza González's performance and her character arc saves the overarching storyline, the villains are fun, and there are some pulpy thrills to be had along the way. However, some of the main protagonists feel less interesting this time round while some are wasted or just there, and the whole thing starts to run of steam towards the end. But most of all, it just feels somewhat flat and joyless overall, still being unable to justify its existence.

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★★★ 6



CURTAIN

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JARON HENRIE-MCCREA / SCREENPLAY: CARYS EDWARDS, JARON HENRIE-MCCREA / STARRING: DANNI SMITH, TIM LUEKE, MARTIN MONAHAN / RELEASE DATE: JULY 18TH

Hard sells don't come much harder than that of *Curtain*, a horror film about, yep, a shower curtain. Or, if you want to be specific about it, the absence of a shower curtain. Tired of the nursing life, world-weary Danni starts over again, taking a job as a chugger (charity mugger; you know the type) and relocates

to a poky flat with a mattress on the floor and persistently disappearing shower curtains. Ooh, spooky.

As horror movie set-ups go, it's not exactly the *Necronomicon Ex-Mortis* or haunted videotapes, but it's from these innocuous beginnings that one of the smartest and

most likeable films of the year emerges. To say much more would be to spoil some great surprises, but suffice to say that *Curtain* packs in an *Evil Dead*-esque sense of energy (complete with visual flourishes) and a story that should have viewers hooked until the end. As a character work, it's second to none, with Danni and Tim (Danni Smith and Tim Lueke) keenly drawn, likeable and flawed in all the right places. Smith does particularly well as Danni; her blunt, slightly withdrawn and distant character isn't the most personable (certainly not when we describe her like that) but she really sells her vulnerability and softer side. Lueke, in a role that could have turned out awfully annoying is a fun, vaguely adorable sidekick. It's refreshing that *Curtain* doesn't try to shoehorn a romance into the pair's relationship, instead depicting a sweet, tentative friendship that gives the film its sizeable, beating heart.

There's humour too. We're

not in full-on comedy horror territory, but it certainly skews more in that direction than it does elsewhere (although its *Hellraiser*-type cult is particularly creepy). Well, it is a film about disappearing shower curtains, after all. With a title and concept like that, *Curtain* was always going to be one of the year's most original horror films. Thankfully, it also turns out to be one of the best.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



DOOMWATCH (1972)

BD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: PETER SASDY / SCREENPLAY: CLIVE EXTON / STARRING: IAN BANNEN, JUDY GEESON, PERCY HERBERT, GEORGE SANDERS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Something strange is going on in the remote island community of Balfe. When the ecological department 'Doomwatch' sends Dr Del Shaw (Ian Bannen) to the island, to gather evidence following a recent oil tanker spill, he receives a frosty reception - the islanders are more insular and inbred than expected and even the local police make it clear he isn't welcome. When Shaw finds the body of a young girl buried in the woods, and is viciously attacked by a deformed man while investigating the villagers' suspicious behaviour, he discovers that illegal chemicals dumped in the waters around the island have infected the fish the islanders are eating, causing hideous mutations in

many of the population that lead to random violent outbursts and eventual madness. Shaw enlists the help of schoolteacher Victoria Brown (Judy Geeson) to try and uncover the truth, not realising that the islanders will go to terrifying lengths to protect their community and make sure that news of their condition doesn't make it back to the mainland.

Released in 1972, *Doomwatch* was a big screen version of the popular BBC TV series created by Gerry Davis and Kit Pedler, the brains behind *Doctor Who*'s iconic Cybermen. Despite its horror movie trappings (there's a decidedly 'Wicker Man' quality to this island, even though The

Wicker Man wouldn't be released until almost two years later), it's really a cautionary thriller that is probably more relevant now than it has ever been, plugging into our primal neuroses about chemically tainted or suspiciously bio-engineered foods, chem trails, pollutants and other government/big business conspiracies.

At the time of its release, fans of the TV series were upset by the sidelining of their favourite characters in favour of Ian Bannen and Judy Geeson, neither of whom had featured in the small screen incarnation. Although the stars of the television show did appear, their presence in the story was significantly reduced, but that's probably just as well because the TV cast seem a pretty dull bunch whereas Bannen makes for a convincing and sympathetic leading man, and his chemistry with Geeson is excellent. The island location is terrific as well (the exteriors were actually shot in Cornwall) and director Peter Sasdy, a horror stalwart at the height of his powers (he had recently completed Hammer's *Hands of the Ripper* and his next project would be Nigel Kneale's legendary *The Stone Tape*) makes a fine job of ramping up the atmosphere.

But it's the screenplay, which is peculiarly credited to the much-underrated English

screenwriter Clive Exton as the 'final screenplay', suggesting that too many cooks might have already spoiled the broth before Exton even arrived on the scene, which is the problem. It doesn't seem to know what kind of movie it wants to be, and the ending - despite a commendable injection of pathos during a town meeting, when Shaw desperately tries to convince the islanders to accept outside help - doesn't carry the punch this story deserved. It also reduces Geeson's character to a cowering damsel-in-distress, which is a disservice.

Still, it's heart-warming to see *Doomwatch* finally get a Blu-ray release. The print is in good condition, apart from some strange ghosting during the opening night time scene that's so brief it seems unfair to mention, but the only extra is a trailer, which is a little bit of a shame considering the film's quirky importance in the annals of '70s horror/sci-fi cinema. But, despite the lack of extras, this is well worth adding to your collection. Even with its flaws, *Doomwatch* is a highly watchable and occasionally fascinating movie.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



EVEN LAMBS HAVE TEETH

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: TERRY MILES / STARRING: KIRSTEN PROUT, TIERA SKOVBYE, MICHAEL KARL RICHARDS, CRAIG MARCH / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

As you can probably imagine, a film entitled *Even Lambs Have Teeth* was bound to get us dusting off some obvious and utterly irresistible cheap jokes in anticipation of a lo-fi, low-budget, low-quality straight-to-DVD horror shocker. The fun we could have had complaining about 'woolly' scripting and warning you that the film is a "shear waste of time". But sadly we have to put away the jokebook, because *Only Lambs Have Teeth* has defied our expectations and, some quibbles aside, turns out to be a rather good little revenge thriller which

lurches – quite uneasily it has to be said – from the genuinely quite disturbing to the genuinely quite silly.

Best friends forever Sloane and Katie set off to spend some time at an organic farm, but after they befriend a couple of likely local lads at a diner, they're driven out to a wilderness farmhouse and drugged. They wake up, stripped to their underwear, and chained up inside a couple of grim industrial container units deep in the forest. Under pain of death they're – there's no pleasant way of putting this – used

and abused by any number of grubby low-lives (including the local sheriff and a priest who prefers to wear a grotesque pig mask) who pay handsomely for the privilege. This is actually uncomfortable stuff for a while; the girls' dilemma is genuinely appalling and degrading and the indignities they suffer aren't just unpleasant, they verge on the voyeuristic. But, as the film's title warns us, even lambs have teeth. Inevitably the girls turn the tables and manage to free themselves – whereupon they tool up and set off looking for bloody revenge on everyone who has tormented and humiliated them over the last few days.

Fortunately, the film's tone lightens somewhat once the girls are free; we're mercifully spared any more of their ordeal and it becomes a more stylised and fairly predictable revenge romp. Logic and realism are hurled out of the window as the girls – still in their pants and covered in blood – hack and hammer their way around the neighbourhood dispensing their very own brand of justice, at least one example of which is sure to bring tears to the eyes of the gentlemen in the audience. The film ignores the fact that the girls have effectively been

repeatedly raped; they don't seem especially traumatised by their experiences and they slip into their new roles as ruthless, calculating killers with unlikely ease. It's surely best to not worry about the giant plot-holes and the extraordinary half-time change of tone as this snappy, no-nonsense bloodbath canter towards the finishing line and the girls merrily batter and immolate their tormentors.

Even *Lambs Have Teeth* is a bit all over the place but it's hard not to admire its guts and its chutzpah. Despite his over-reliance on irritating jump cuts, Terry Miles directs his own snappy script with gusto and the performances are pretty much just about as competent as they need to be for what is, in essence, a better-than-average B-movie exploitation flick. If you can cope with the first forty minutes or so, which promise an entirely different and much darker film than the one we finally end up with, we think you'll find that *Even Lambs Have Teeth* is worth dipping into. *[Hang on now... - Ed]*

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★ 7



THE STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: KYLE PATRICK ALVAREZ / SCREENPLAY: TIM TALBOTT / STARRING: BILLY CRUDUP, EZRA MILLER, MICHAEL ANGARANO, THOMAS MANN, NELSAN ELLIS, TYE SHERIDAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In 1971, Stanford University psychology professor Philip Zimbardo (Crudup) conducted an experiment whereby a prison environment was simulated, with one set of students assigned to be prisoners and another taking on the role of guards, having no idea just how much of an equal success and failure it would be.

The film captures well the escalation of the events

as faithfully as the confines of a two-hour narrative will allow, and its ensemble cast of largely unknown young actors convincingly portray the swift descent into base behaviour. Both prisoners and guards at first treat it like a game, but quickly begin to assimilate into the roles they have been assigned. Guards in real prisons have higher authorities to

answer to should their behaviour become too extreme, but once the Stanford guards realise there will be no consequences for anything they do, their actions escalate with an alarming inventiveness. The speed with which the psychological abuse the guards inflict upon the prisoners intensifies becomes truly apparent when, after a lengthy sequence of humiliation and degradation, a caption appears reading 'Day 2'.

That the film largely follows the real-life events makes for difficult viewing, both from watching the psychological abuse inflicted and also wondering at how people could either perpetrate such acts or allow their infliction upon each other. The film becomes a frustrating watch once the flaws in the experiment's validity become apparent, most notably in Zimbardo not only observing the experiment, but also participating in it in the role of prison superintendent. In doing so, he influences the progression of events and thus taints its development and invalidates any conclusions that can be taken from it. You'd have thought that

as a professor at a respected university, this is an important detail that would have occurred to him.

To even refer to it as an experiment is something of a misnomer, as Zimbardo is not testing a specific hypothesis but merely observing a situation. Drunk on the absolute power he has assigned himself, he ignores the potential danger of the contentions in favour of waiting to see how they will further degrade, practically giving himself a hard-on with the unexpected intensity of the microcosmic animal factory he has created. You begin to wonder just how long it will take him to realise the unethical and immoral implications of what he is wilfully allowing to happen.

Like the experiment itself, the film is an insightful and unnerving exploration into the darker traits of human nature, but also like the experiment, it goes on long after it's established all that it set out to.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★★★★★ 7



VICTORIA

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: SEBASTIAN SCHIPPER / SCREENPLAY: SEBASTIAN SCHIPPER, OLIVIA NEERGAARD-HOLM, EIKE FREDERIK SCHULZ / STARRING: LAIA COSTA, FREDERICK LAU / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Some films are known mostly for their filmic gimmicks, whether it be an entirely first person viewpoint, a disordered chronology or being denounced by the Catholic Church. The long take is a technique that often appears in films but rarely do they last for the whole movie. Most recently, the Oscar-winning *Birdman* was made to seem like one shot that lasted its entire two-hour running time, spanning several days in

the course of the film's story; in reality, several long shots were stitched together with editing trickery. *Victoria*'s entire two-hour-twenty-minute length was shot in one long take without any editing. So does this huge achievement amount to anything more than a useful marketing technique? Thankfully, yes.

Victoria (Costa), a young Spanish woman who has been living in Berlin for several months, meets a group of friends

in a club in the early hours of the morning. Their burgeoning friendship and flirtations take a dark turn as the group is forced into committing an illegal act.

As the credits roll, the first person listed is the cinematographer Sturla Brandth Grøvlen and he is most certainly the MVP of the film. The camera moves from lifts, upstairs, into cars and stays with the characters and action when they run around, cycle, dance, and dive about. That the camera keeps up with them is a testament to the skill and planning of the filmmakers; the fact that the shot is always focused, coherent and often wonderful-looking is nothing short of a miracle. The camera makes you feel like another player in the story, making you complicit with everything that the group do, which can make you even feel guilty.

Instead of writing a full script, *Victoria* consisted of a twelve-page story treatment. As a result, most of the dialogue was improvised, something that the cast have taken to with aplomb. None of the dialogue or scenes feel awkward or forced. The

characters may have rough edges but you grow to feel empathetic towards them and become interested in their lives and their predicament as their backstories slowly unfold. Our eponymous protagonist *Victoria* is a young woman who feels alone and isolated in a city where she knows nobody and we are happy to see her connect and make friends with people. One or two of her decisions feel a little like they are chosen just to progress the story, the only minor criticism we have of the film, but they don't feel entirely outside of her character. The laddish group of guys that she falls in with are enjoyable, well-rounded and human. The soundtrack, a first-time film score from composer Nils Frahm, is subtle and affecting, drifting in to lift and perfectly complement certain scenes.

Technically astonishing, exciting, intense, well performed and entertaining, *Victoria* is quite simply one of the best films of the year.

COURTNEY BUTTON

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



THE LESSON

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: RUTH PLATT / STARRING: ROBERT HANDS, EVAN BENDALL, MICHAELA PRCHALOVÁ, TOM COX, DOLYA GAVANSKI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Torture porn can be aspirational. Who'd have thunk it? Ruth Platt, writer and director of *The Lesson*, did and here she's entirely right. The story follows a beleaguered teacher as he attempts to maintain control of his pupils. Let's guess, he then gets really annoyed and then murders them all? Not quite. The key to the narrative is realising that the only true method of learning is working out what affects the individual. As the early scenes point out, individual background as base

tongue may yet reveal hidden depths as the cause of tides that can change worlds. In this case, the world is hidden behind the hard-set brows, heavy beats, idle bikes and car-scratching knives of a group of unromanticised teenagers.

The script and direction clearly show Platt's background as an Oxford University-educated Classics scholar, director and actress in her own right. The writing itself has nuance, but this is teased out through the performance of

Robert Hands as Mr. Gale. It is not quite true to say that he is a great actor throughout, as some of the louder segments lose their intensity partly due to his delivery and the camera framing, but what he does beautifully is convey the gloomy irony of one used to banging his head against the wall, and he is particularly effective in the more comic moments when abstract threat is realised. From his full introduction onwards, the camera's frontal yet often slightly cropped perspective invites the audience to assess his performance (with all that that implies) as well as lending the narrative a sense of the paradoxical claustrophobia caused by his ideals. What's more, Hands' speech on the imagination is beautiful (and terrible) in its own right.

Hands is ably abetted by Evan Bendall, Michaela Prchalová, and Tom Cox. As the first half (perhaps consciously) initially mires them in stereotype, their characters only emerge towards the latter half of the piece. Their representations become almost archetypal, with Prchalová almost impossibly distant, Bendall with hidden lightning wits and Cox as a

malleable joker figure. One section shot against a sunset is superb for conveying the complex impetuosity of youth. They in turn are supported by others who merely build intensity into the central narrative.

The film is not without its problems. One of the early scenes contains some horrendous acting, slightly disrupting the tone, and the violent sequences are at times predictable. It is also the case that while the models of ethics are discussed without jargon (is it ever appropriate to nail gun someone to a table?), this film isn't one for the casual cider swiller unless they have a degree or at least a healthy interest in literature. Indeed, at one point, Gale addresses a character/ the camera to ask if they're still following the argument. If you know even half the references in here, the film finishes with a haunting and complex clarity. Only the truly educated are free, as Platt's thoughtful and oddly poignant torture porn attests.

CHARLIE OUGHTON

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



PARASYTE: PART 2

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: TAKASHI YAMAZAKI / SCREENPLAY: RYÔTA KOSAWA, TAKASHI YAMAZAKI / STARRING: SHÔTA SOMETANI, SADAÔ ABE, ERI FUKATSU, AI HASHIMOTO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Part One of *Parasyte* saw extraterrestrial parasites descend en masse and slide inside people's ears to take over their brains. One of the few people opposing their gradual takeover and slaughter of humans for food is teenager Shin'ichi, whose parasite Miki ended up lodged in his right hand, the two of them forming a symbiotic relationship to survive.

Shin'ichi is now wanted as a serial killer of the parasite-infected and has become hunted by Goto, a psychotic and seemingly unstoppable death machine consisting of a symbiotic assortment of five

separate parasites determined to kill Shin'ichi and Miki and bring an end to their opposition. Further conflict comes from the goals of the aliens having become divided; some of them believe humanity needs to be destroyed to save it from itself, while others are of the opinion that a path of coexistence will be more beneficial to both races. One of the latter is parasite leader Tamiya, who, after becoming a mother, finds her priorities irrevocably shifted and begins to undergo an existential crisis.

Several of the dangling plot threads left at the end of the

first film are continued, such as Shin'ichi's girlfriend Satomi being left traumatised after witnessing her school friends being massacred and the police investigation into Shin'ichi's murders, but the way they are handled forms part of the film's main problem. Instead of being the second of a two-part story, this feels like the closing chapter of a trilogy, with the narrative-heavy expansion of the middle instalment having taken place during the time skipped over between these two films. This means that the story has leapt straight from setup to denouement without any of the required intervening development, thus robbing the various character arc zeniths of their deserved impact. Although this is unequivocally the story's culmination, it feels like we've been cheated out of much of what we were promised.

Through its brazen violence, the story also manages to continue the streak of philosophising that began in the first movie, developing it further with how some of the aliens perceive the duality of consideration inherent in the human condition. Specifically, we plunder, pillage and otherwise ravage the planet upon which we live, but in spite of this can still display boundless levels of compassion for one another, and it's through

this that the story's most meaningful observations about the importance of life are able to be made.

The creature design is just as impressive, with the parasite-controlled people being essentially composed of individual parts that can detach and function autonomously, the morphing flesh looking like some hybrid of the Thing and the T-1000. The black humour of violence that such excessive body horror invokes occasionally relieves the grim tone, but for the most part it's a bleak and brutal ride. Overall, *Parasyte* has decent ideas and portrays them in an engaging manner, but it would have been a lot more satisfying if we had actually been given something that felt like a complete story.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★★★★★ 7



HE NEVER DIED

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JASON KRAWCZYK / STARRING: HENRY ROLLINS, KATE GREENHOUSE, JORDAN TODOSEY, BOOBOO STEWART, STEVEN OGG / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

He Never Died is a darkly comic tale of an immortal cannibal from writer/director Jason Krawczyk. Punk legend Henry Rollins (Black Flag) plays Jack - an introverted, solitary character whose only real sources of human interaction are at the bingo hall or with the waitress at the local diner, Cara (Kate

Greenhouse). Now, this doesn't really adhere to the preconceptions you'd conjure up when you hear the words 'immortal cannibal', but that's entirely the point. He Never Died often feels like more of a character study in depression and existentialism than a horror film intended to scare, and this gives the film a

refreshing, original pulse.

Rollins' portrayal of Jack is superb throughout; at times he is sympathetic and misunderstood, at others a calculated badass. A performance that's complemented by two strong female leads in the aforementioned Cara, and also with the arrival of his estranged daughter Andrea (Todorey) whose effervescent nature seeks to pierce Jack's icy demeanour.

The film has a lot to it, both in terms of narrative and style. Jack's whole origin story is cryptic, with brilliantly subtle flashes here and there (don't worry, we won't spoil anything). There are also so many thematic and generic conventions on show that combine to shake loose any clear genre restrictions. For example, Jack could arguably be a vampire due to numerous suggestions, including a memorable extract that is evocative of a scene in Guillermo del Toro's directorial début *Cronos*. Equally, there are

also elements of hard-boiled noir, and the film is visually set upon a saturated, gritty noir-esque canvas. The soundtrack is also noteworthy for giving the film something sonically unique. The non-diegetic soundscape of rushing trains and urban noises acts as an ongoing metaphor for Jack's conflicted psyche.

He Never Died has more than enough blood splattering and bone crushing to keep the avid horror fan entertained, but it also has a depth and a gauged inclusion of genuine humour that may draw horror sceptics to its cause. Krawczyk's script and Rollins' portrayal of Jack create a character shrouded in an alluring cloud of enigmatic ambivalence and further examinations may well be on the cards with a miniseries in the works...

FORD MADDOX BROWN

★★★★★★★ 8



BLOOD BATH (1966)

BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JACK HILL, STEPHANIE ROTHMAN / STARRING: WILLIAM CAMPBELL, MARISSA MATHES, LORI SAUNDERS, SANDRA KNIGHT / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

How many words have we got? [About 450 – Ed] This is going to be tricky. [Well, get on with it? – Ed]

Blood Bath is a somewhat notorious movie that's probably best known for its ridiculously convoluted route to the screen. Here goes: Roger Corman took over the production of Yugoslavian spy flick Operation Titian (1963) but decided it was unreleasable and re-edited it into a murder movie called Portrait in Terror (1965), which eventually

made it to television. Even so, Corman asked Jack Hill if he could do anything with it. Hill filmed some extra bits in exotic locations to keep the Eastern European feel and turned it into *Blood Bath*, a movie about a mad sculptor who kills his models and turns them into sculptures. It also featured beatniks (including Sid Haig) but was never released as Corman still wasn't satisfied. So then he got Stephanie Rothman to have another go. The original mad

artist (William Campbell – you know him from classic Trek's *Trouble with Tribbles* and *The Squire of Gothos*) refused to have anything more to do with this (who can blame him?) so he's replaced by someone who looks nothing like he does. The solution is simple: he's now a vampire who can change his appearance (if only Ed Wood had thought of that). This one was finally put out as *Blood Bath* (1966), but we haven't finished there: it was too short for television so even more additional material was added and it became *Track of the Vampire* (1966). So not only has it turned from an Eastern European spy movie into an American vampire yarn with beatniks, somewhere along the line Patrick Magee's substantial part in the first movie is reduced to a blink-and-you'll-miss-it appearance as a corpse in the final one.

With us? Don't worry if you're not, because it obviously has stinker written all over it. Except, it isn't. Out of the above mess, we actually get a not-too-bad B-movie. By some miracle, the plot makes sense, there are

some genuinely eerie dream sequences and the humour with the beatniks still manages to be quite funny. In fact, the whole artist/beatnik thing makes the film somewhat similar to Corman's classic *A Bucket of Blood* (1959), but with added creepiness and vampirism (and you need to see *A Bucket of Blood* if you haven't already).

But what we haven't enough words to do is review *Operation Titian*, *Portrait in Terror* or *Track of the Vampire*, because believe it or not, those heroic people at Arrow Video have included all four movies on two discs. Think that's pretty much above and beyond. They're worth a watch and there are some great extras.

How many words is that? [450 – Ed] Get in!

Extras: *Operation Titian*, *Portrait in Terror* and *Track of the Vampire* / visual essay by Tim Lucas / interview with Sid Haig / interview with Jack Hill / stills gallery / poster / booklet.

JOHN KNOTT

★★★★★★★★★ 7



KILL COMMAND

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: STEVEN GOMEZ / STARRING: VANESSA KIRBY, THURE LINDHARDT, DAVID AJALA, BENTLEY KALU / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's humans versus big, spindly, skeletal robots in this lively and unbelievably low-budget sci-fi actioner whose focus is very firmly on its hardware and special effects rather than its human interest. Fair enough. You won't give a mechanical monkey's uncle what happens to any of the generic grunts (and one female human/robot hybrid) who populate the first full-length feature by FX guru Steven Gomez, but there's still some fun to be had in the well

executed action sequences and superbly realised killer robots brought to the screen on a budget of... wait for it... just one million dollars.

The snappy, if perfunctory, script takes us to the near future (although it looks a bit like the far future to us) where an elite squad of marines is dumped on a remote island on what's intended to be a routine training exercise. Of course, this is precisely what it isn't. The group is cut off from civilisation and

their communications are down. Enter an army of psychopathic murderous robots – incredibly advanced military killing machines – and as the shooting and the dying starts, the group realises that the computer-interfaced semi-human Mills (Kirby) is able to forge some sort of command connection to the tireless robots. But the trouble is, they can't really be sure whose side she's on and who exactly she is...

Kill Command is really all about those visuals. For the money available, the effects are pretty outstanding, a blend of *Starship Troopers* dropships and *Terminator*-like robots. The resemblance to genre forebears doesn't end there, though; worryingly, it initially looks as if our heroes have pitched up in an early episode of TV's *Stargate* (via the first *Predator*) as they find themselves wandering around familiar-looking pine forests. Fortunately, scenes of the multi-legged robots stomping around the woods en masse indulging in furious gun battles with the grunts is enough to distract us from the mundanity of the location until the story shifts into a more interesting industrial setting,

as the survivors take refuge in a nearby devastated test installation. Having already set out its familiar stall with its survival-of-the-fittest hunter-becomes-hunted scenario, *Kill Command* never really surprises in terms of its narrative; Mills' machine connection is signposted well enough in advance for the audience to at least have a fair idea where and how the story's going to play out, but there's still some tension and edginess at the climax when she finally confronts the boss robot and makes what might well be irrevocable decision about her own destiny.

Kill Command isn't necessarily one you'll be in a hurry to rewatch with your mates, but taken on its own terms, and especially with the resources available to realise it, it's a brisk, accomplished effort with a lot more wit, integrity, and intelligence than some of the more lavishly budgeted genre movies which overwhelm the multiplexes. Our command... watch *Kill Command*.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★★★ 6



LAST GIRL STANDING

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: BENJAMIN R. MOODY / STARRING: AKASHA VILLALOBOS, DANIELLE EVON PLOEGER, BRIAN VILLALOBOS, KELSEY PRIBILSKI, JASON VINES / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Benjamin R. Moody's *Last Girl Standing* is certainly a unique beast, being part character study, part slasher movie as it follows the sole survivor of a psychotic lunatic's roaring rampage of bloodshed and carnage.

As the film opens, we see Camryn (Villalobos) frantically fighting for her life against a masked killer (Vines) as her friends' dead bodies are strewn all around her.

Managing to just about outwit the monster and escape with her life, Camryn has survived this ordeal, but at what cost? Picking things up with her a little down the line, we find her living a solitary, soulless existence that involves flitting between her one-bedroom apartment and her mundane employment in a local laundromat. For poor Camryn, every stranger is a threat,

every noise is a sign of danger, and social skills are something that have long since left her.

When Nick (Villalobos) starts working at the laundromat, Camryn finds herself within arm's reach of some sense of normalcy as he does his best to integrate her into his group of friends. The problem is, is Camryn too far gone and has too much damage been done to her psyche? That's what *Last Girl Standing* looks to explore as we see the aftereffects of the trauma that its lead character has had to endure.

Moody's movie is brimming full of promise in how it looks to address an age-old question that has regularly reared its head over the decades: what happens to the survivor of a horror film once the credits have finished rolling? *Last Girl Standing* does a fantastic job of exploring this angle during its opening hour or so, although the final act ends up feeling a little too dragged out and overplayed as things take a dramatic twist that many may see coming. Before the last half hour, though, we get

a well-crafted, delicate and bleak look into Camryn and the social inadequacies, mistrust, insecurities and fear that haunt her on a daily basis. It's during this time that *Last Girl Standing* is at its finest, giving viewers something truly special in a film that many may have written off as a generic slasher movie beforehand. That's not to say that there aren't elements of a slasher thrown in here, mind.

Whilst officially described as both a character study and a slasher, it's firmly as a character study that *Last Girl Standing* shines. Unfortunately, though, for all of the good work done in the first hour of the movie, things do sadly become a little formulaic as Moody's film drags itself to a close. As a unique viewing experience, however, this is a film worth hunting down for long-time horror hounds looking for a different perspective on the genre.

ANDREW POLLARD



THE MERMAID

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: STEPHEN CHOW / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: CHAO DENG, YUN LIN, SHOW LUO, YUQI ZHANG / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

From Chinese director Stephen Chow, the man who brought us comedy action extravaganza *Kung Fu Hustle*, comes fantasy love story *The Mermaid*. It's a weird adventure and one that seems odd for China's highest grossing film of all time.

Essentially, *The Mermaid* is an Adult fairy tale; a retelling of *The Little Mermaid* with a bonkers sense of humour. Seriously, it doesn't matter if you don't like/never watch Chinese cinema, subtitled films,

or fantasy; you will still laugh your arse off. Chow churns out his usual brand of sickeningly unlucky humour and ridiculous fantasy, allowing a set of well-developed characters the chance to put themselves in preposterously cruel situations. Botched assassinations and a brutal self-sushi sequence are top of the list for black comedy gold. You're pretty much guaranteed to find something to wince at.

After *Shaolin Soccer* and

Kung Fu Hustle, it would have been nice to see a bit more action. But then, the film is never more charming than when it focuses on the smaller picture, allowing performers Deng Chao and Yun Lin to showcase their comic timing and the excellent dialogue. The digital effects are a strange issue too. Due to the overall garishness of the film, the ropery effects shouldn't be too much of an eyesore, but a lot of it looks plain bad. Maybe that's purposeful, considering that *The Mermaid* is about the collision of two very different worlds, perhaps never better actualised than through the dodgy reality-meets-fantasy aesthetic of the mer-people. We suppose there's a point to be made here: just because you can see the strings, doesn't mean you can't enjoy the puppet show.

The charms of Chow's latest aren't limited to a finely tuned humour or romance. The production design of the mermaid hideaway is a thing of obnoxious splendour, a derelict ship full of colour and vibrancy. Some ace song choices, zany editing, and - if those aren't your interests - jetpack shenanigans, prove a live-wire appreciation for shameless fun. Thankfully,

Chow knows not to ditch his nastier tastes in the face of the fairy tale-isms, keeping a fairly grotesque sensibility throughout without going too far. At its nastiest, the violence is shocking, whilst at its most reserved it has the capacity to be hilarious.

This isn't quite a film for all ages as there's too much eco-chat and business jargon early on to keep kids interested, but there's so much good-natured humour and fantastical imagery that it feels like it might bridge a gap. At the very least, adults will really appreciate having such a pleasantly acidic and hilarious bedtime fairy tale.

SCOTT CLARK



THE LATEST NEWS
FROM THE WORLD OF
AUDIO ADVENTURES
BY TONY JONES

AUDIOSTATIC



More NEVERWHERE

Autumn 2016 will see a return to radio for the Marquis de Carabas and the world of London Below, as first explored in **Neverwhere**. Details are scarce, but we expect a short (perhaps two parts) story from Neil Gaiman and Dirk Maggs.

There will be a mix of new and old characters, and the cast includes Bernard Cribbins as Old Bailey, David Harewood as the Marquis, and Paterson Joseph.

Previously, Dirk Maggs brought the world of London Below to radio in 2013.

ALICE'S WUNDERLAND

Of course, Neil Gaiman wasn't the first to explore an alternative version of the modern world (see for example the Genesis album **The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway**) and they can all trace their way back to **Alice in Wonderland**. Appropriately, The Wireless Theatre Company has made **Alice's Wonderland** free to download.

This is a great way to try the work of this production house, more known, perhaps, to STARBURST readers as the home of the award-winning **Springheel'd Jack**. **Wonderland** is written by Alice Lowe and performed by final year actors at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

RADIATION WORLD

If you like post-apocalyptic audio (and who doesn't), you could do worse than listening to **Radiation World**, written by Hari Rai Khalsa with engineering by Sahib Simran Khalsa. The cast includes Dylan Norman as Captain Thompson, Isaac Christie as Yolo, Zoey Reese as Piper and many more.

While they are happy to take donations, all ten episodes (so far) are free to download from radiation.world. Why not take a listen?

BBC Radio

Following recent excursions into the works of John Wyndham, with an excellent version of **The Kraken Wakes** as part of the Radio 4 **Dangerous Visions** season, Radio 4 Extra has repeated a 17-part series of **The Day of the Triffids**, read by Roger May. They also broadcast a repeat of the 2010 documentary **John Wyndham: No Place Like Earth**, in which Dan Rebellato explores John Wyndham's impact on science fiction.

If that wasn't enough, Radio 4 Extra followed this with a new (to radio) broadcast of Simon Clark's **Night of the Triffids**. This was broadcast in five parts with Sam Troughton and Nicola Bryant. This is also available from Big Finish and was released in 2014. These should still be available on iPlayer for a short time.

Big Finish

So onto Big Finish themselves. We've had an announcement of Adric joining the main range of **Doctor Who** stories, and it will be interesting to hear how they reengage fans with a character who was not particularly popular. This wouldn't be the first time Big Finish has helped listeners reassess an established character from the show – such as Melanie Bush, who also re-appears in a new trilogy with both the Seventh Doctor and Ace! More in Mel at Big Finish elsewhere in this issue [see page 70].

BIG FINISH WE LOVE STORIES

Key titles to watch out for this month from Big Finish...

DOCTOR WHO: THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES 5.07 THE PURSUIT OF HISTORY

A plan put into place centuries before is about to come together as the Doctor (Tom Baker), along with companions Romana (Lalla Ward) and K9 (John Leeson), detects an energy stream causing distortions in the Vortex. David Warner and Toby Hadoke co-star in the first half of a two-part story.

AVAILABLE JULY 30TH

DOCTOR WHO - SHORT TRIPS 6.07 THE BLAME GAME

Rufus Hound narrates a new adventure for the Third Doctor as he attempts to make a deal to escape his exile on Earth imposed by the Time Lords.

AVAILABLE JULY 30TH

THE AVENGERS - THE LOST EPISODES VOLUME 6

Another three recreations of lost episodes of the classic British TV series. Steed (Julian Wadham) and Dr Keel (Anthony Howell) have to investigate an intimidation expert, find a killer in a government dockyard, and go to Southend... The perils never stop for our dapper heroes.

AVAILABLE JULY 30TH

TORCHWOOD 2.5 BROKEN

Fan favourite Ianto Jones is front and centre as he attempts to escape the day-to-day hazards of his time at Torchwood. He retreats to a pub where he feels safe; that is, until his boss Captain Jack Harkness walks in... Gareth David-Lloyd and John Barrowman bring their best to the passionate roles once more.

AVAILABLE JULY 30TH

THE NEW COUNTER-MEASURES: WHO KILLED TOBY KINSELLA?

A feature-length adventure featuring the return of the trio introduced in the Doctor Who serial *Remembrance of the Daleks*, Group Captain Gilmore (Simon Williams), Rachel Jensen (Pamela Salem), and Allison Williams (Karen Gledhill).

AVAILABLE JULY 30TH

To order, or for more information,
head over to bigfinish.com

THE MUSIC OF DC COMICS: VOLUME 2



first volume, subtitled **The 75th Anniversary Collection**, came out in 2010, and featured music such as John Williams' **Superman** theme, **Swamp Thing** by Christopher Shore, and Hoyt Curtin's **Superfriends** theme. What could possibly be left? Quite a bit, actually: this second volume includes music from **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice**, the **Batman: The Animated Series** theme, and the first commercially-available release of any music from Fox's **Gotham**. It's available digitally and on compact disc as this issue comes out, with the double vinyl version to follow.

We really oughtn't need run through composer John Williams' bona fides, but the short list includes **Star Wars**, **Jaws**, **Harry Potter**, **Indiana Jones**, and **Close Encounters of the Third Kind**. The only person who's been nominated for more Academy Awards is Walt Disney. He's also won Grammys, BAFTAs, and Golden Globes. However, last month, Williams received a very high honour, indeed: he was the first ever composer honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Film Institute, in a ceremony hosted by Steven Spielberg.

Coincidentally, Walt Disney Records has the latest John Williams score out now, for Spielberg's Roald Dahl adaptation, **The BFG**. What we've heard is reminiscent of the innocent and joyful music he did for the **Harry Potter** series, as well as reflecting the same sense of magic and adventure. It's very much a mix of what you'd expect from a pairing between these two cinematic icons, if not particularly ground-breaking or novel.

If you're looking to break the bank (and possibly your back, judging by the size of this thing), Spacelab9 will be releasing a massive 6-LP box set featuring all 65 tracks composed by Inon Zur for the **Fallout 4** soundtrack. The box set houses the six 'Vault Suit' blue vinyl LPs in three gatefold jackets, which all fit inside a heavy-duty

Theodore Shapiro already scored one of the year's underground hits with his work for Karyn Kusama's thriller, **The Invitation**. That's seen release via Lakeshore Records on compact disc and digital, as well as a Mondo vinyl LP. However, he's going from that score - which was recorded using just one violin and overdubs - to one of the most hotly anticipated potential blockbusters of the summer, Paul Feig's **Ghostbusters** reboot. It's out now on compact disc from Sony Classical.

There's also a soundtrack offering, of which two songs have been released. First was Elle King's **Good Girls**, a solidly rocking dance number that takes advantage of King's raspy snarl to create something which sounds like a 21st-century Wanda Jackson song. The rockabilly-by-way-of-Ibiza is fun, but not necessarily something that really brings busting ghosts to mind. Then again, neither does the Missy Elliott and Fall Out Boy reworking of Ray Parker Jr.'s original theme song, so who knows what else the soundtrack will offer?

Water Tower Music released Joseph Bishara's score to **The Conjuring 2** via

most digital music outlets last month, and if you've seen the film, you know that this is one of Bishara's most wide-ranging compositions yet. He works in his standard vein of disconcertingly minimalist pieces, but also adds in some nicely electronic synth work and beautifully orchestrated traditional film score as well. It's quite striking, and works well within the film's '70s milieu. It's especially nice when heard in conjunction with all the '70s pop songs in James Wan's movie.

The Conjuring 2 might have the best use of the Bee Gees' **I Started a Joke** we've ever heard in a film. It also has the most clichéd use of **London Calling**, as well, so it is a bit of a wash.

Also out on Water Tower is the second volume of **The Music of DC Comics**. The





box. It's a limited edition of 1000, and is priced fairly reasonably, although international shipping looks to increase the price a full 25%.

There are rarely any chances to own concert DVDs from film composers. Live albums of their material are fairly copious - if you're talking John Williams and other big names - but we can't think of very many concert films. Thankfully, Varèse Sarabande just released **Hollywood in Vienna: The World of James Horner** on Blu-ray. It's a full concert, with David Newman conducting the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra in a collection of the composer's music. It includes everything the composer's notably done - **Star Trek**, **Gattaca**, **Space Mountain**, **Titanic**, and more. We absolutely cannot wait to get our hands on it.

We talk regularly about the soundtrack revival and how that's influenced a new wave of performers whose music takes from classic electronic genre scores. If you want to keep up, check out the SNDTRK radio show online. It's done by the folks behind Vi-res, and ties in nicely to an upcoming compilation from the new label, Disco Cinematic Recordings, also entitled SNDTRK. It will feature the likes of Vi-res, Repeated Viewing, Slasher Film Festival Strategy, and more. By all accounts, it's to be rather superb. Given that Michael and Kerry Figucio formed the label specifically to release the compilation, we're guessing that they've every confidence in its quality.

Big Gun Media has been posting tracks composed by Harry Manfredini for their upcoming **Friday the 13th** video game, due out this autumn. The cuts are vintage Manfredini, and are perfectly situated within the franchise's musical history. Thankfully, it's not all teasing, because it appears there's going to be an actual release of the game's score, complete with liner notes from the composer. While it's not due out until October, you can pre-order the music on compact disc from the game's website now.

Speaking of video game music from amazing musicians, the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles last month saw the announcement of both a new **Blood Dragon** game from Ubisoft as well as a soundtrack to the game (entitled **Trials of the Blood Dragon**) performed by power metal instrumentalists, Power Glove. The Melbourne band's latest collection is 29

tracks of pure '80s video game awesome, and is available digitally from iTunes.

The latest release from Screamworks Records comes from Frank Ilfman, who composed the music for **Big Bad Wolves**. **Sensoria** is a Swedish film the label calls 'a classic haunted house psychological horror'. Ilfman's score uses piano and music box to create a period piece which, yes, evokes the likes of **The Omen** and **Poltergeist**, but also really comes close to Philippe Sarde's work on **Ghost Story**. It's currently available both digitally and on compact disc.

If you like your film scores fake, we'd like to recommend two releases from cinematically inspired musicians to close out this month's column. First up is Austin, Texas musician Alex Cuervo's third full-length as Espectrostatic. In the middle of June, with just one week's notice, Cuervo released a Bandcamp-exclusive (for now, he says) ten song album entitled **Silhouettes**. It's a tight album, and a couple of the tunes - namely, **Dead End City** and **Ghost Rocket** - might be his darkest and sharpest-edged yet.

We also have an upcoming release from Magnus Sellergren and Videogram. The **Gladiatori dell'Apocalisse** EP will be out via Cinepoli right as this issue is in your hot little hands. We had a chance to take an advance listen and it is, obviously, fantastic, but a few of the cuts on the album are a departure from Sellergren's trademark horror disco tones.

While this isn't the first time Sellergren visited the land of post-apocalyptic jams, it's the first time he's dedicated an entire

release to them. According to him, the appeal is due to the fact that he's loved **Mad Max** and **The Road Warrior** since he was a kid and had fun discovering the Italian knock-offs, along with the Italian horror greats later on.

"Musically and sound-wise speaking, I love how they allow you to blend horror and sci-fi sounds," Sellergren explains. *"You're allowed to stretch things a bit more."*

That might explain why the songs on **Gladiatori dell'Apocalisse** such as *Io, Mutante* have Videogram's signature horror disco vibe, but the first few pieces are these different creatures entirely. What led Sellergren to explore the bigger dimensions and sonic avenues on this album is fairly simple, says the composer.

"Just wanting to progress as a songwriter, musician and audio engineer. I am pretty big on audio, I love to spend a day just nerding out with technology, and Videogram, to me, is not only a chance for me to express my love for genre movies, but a way to try out new production and mixing techniques as well."

Sellergren's upcoming material even builds off this new sound, so we're doubly excited to see what comes next. His **Camp Blood** 10-inch EP, released last December, got the attention of Moby collaborators Acid Washed.

"They're fans of the project and decided to get in touch a couple of months back," Sellergren concludes. *"We're currently working on Videogram's second EP of this year and, yes, the title track builds on an outtake from this post-apocalyptic EP. That's all I'm at liberty to share right now!"*



REVIEWS

THE LATEST AUDIO
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



THE TWO MASTERS

WRITER: JOHN DORNEY / DIRECTOR: JAMIE ANDERSON / STARRING: SYLVESTER MCCOY, GEOFFREY BEEVERS, ALEX MACQUEEN / PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW (VIA BIG FINISH), JULY 31ST (GENERAL SALE)

Big Finish is a funny beast; straddling both the original and revived series of Doctor Who, and yet needing to create an identity of its own, sometimes it forgets there are no pictures to go with the dialogue and bombards the listener with a surfeit of invisible imagery – trying to recapture the mood of the twentieth century run without making allowances for the psychological nuances that modern listeners expect. The company's best plays are the ones that live in the mind rather than dying due to the lack of visuals.

With *The Two Masters*, John Dorney hasn't just taken a conceit that would have been right at home in the classic series and

given it a thoroughly modern twist, he's absorbed the way the new series works – particularly but not exclusively Steven Moffat's reading of it – and fashioned a story that actually would have felt right at home in the novels of the *Wilderness Years*, without having to compromise on any of the influences that can be felt running through his plot. If there can be one criticism of the result, it's that there's a fair amount of characters telling one another what's going on rather than simply going on with it; the plot itself introduces quite a considerable scope for characters and situations – and indeed locations – that are often only a minor part of the story

and are moved beyond almost as quickly as they appear. On the other hand, it is entirely to the listeners' benefit that Dorney takes the time to spell things out through fairly natural-sounding dialogue, allowing the intricacies of his concept to bed into the audience's mind without risking confusion. And none of his ideas feel imposed upon his chosen period; Delta and the Banner-men began as one kind of story before revealing its true self later on, and the notion of destiny and the Time Lords was woven throughout the Seventh Doctor's era. Throw in a few of the conceits from *Journey's End* and *The Big Bang* and a huge splash of wibbly-wobbly Blinovitch

Limitation, and what you end up with is a sort of Doctor Who's Greatest Conceptual Hits.

To say anything of what happens would be to either undermine the listener's journey of discovery, or to promote expectations that aren't about to be satisfied. Suffice it to say the Seventh Doctor is travelling alone when he runs into some old nemeses as an aperitif for some even older and more significant nemeses – or rather, the same nemesis conducting a convoluted, but entirely logically constructed, plot to self-assassinate. There is what at first appears to be a separate issue concerning memory and emerging cracks in the timelines, but a temporal diversion at the beginning of the third episode brings everything into complete clarity. Clarity enough for the focus of the second half of the play to be the gradual unravelling of the increasing complication of the first half, at least. This is superbly structured to prompt explanations that actually add further textures to the mystery – and whenever a subplot is introduced that doesn't appear to be living up to its significance, you can almost guarantee it will turn out to be more consequential than you at first imagined.

John Dorney doesn't have quite the wit of his obvious inspiration Robert Holmes (but then, who does?), and some of the humour is diluted by the occasional over-enunciation that's one of the common pitfalls of audio drama. But Dorney's grasp of the time paradox potentialities is faultless, and his achievement is that he makes *The Two Masters* clear enough to follow that what could have been a disaffectingly dense experience is actually a thoroughly entertaining one. If the title might have led you to prepare for something that couldn't be lived up to, this is instead everything you might have hoped it would be. A real gem.

JR SOUTHALL

★★★★★★★★★ 9

FROM THE WORLDS OF
**DOCTOR
WHO**



JEMMA REDGRAVE • INGRID OLIVER • WARREN BROWN • ALICE KRIGE

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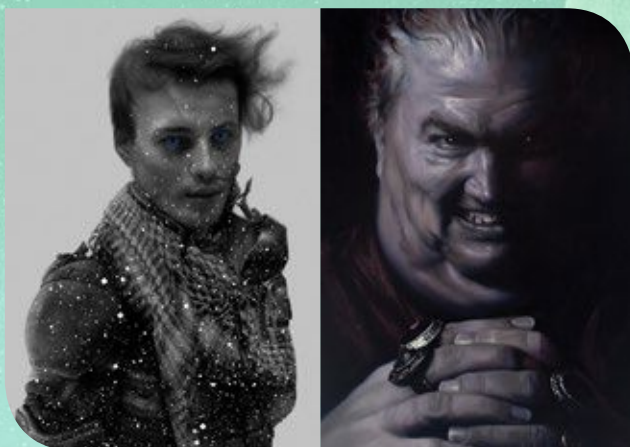
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BRAVE NEW WORDS

ED FORTUNE BRINGS
YOU THE LATEST
NEWS FROM
THE WORLD OF
GENRE LITERATURE



DUNE Artist Nominated for Chesley Awards

Sam Weber is up for a Chesley Award for their gorgeous illustrations in the Folio Society edition of Frank Herbert's **Dune**. Other competitors in the interior category include Marcel Mercado for the **Southlands RPG** and Galen Dara for **Tuesdays with Molakesh the Destroyer**. Weber is also up for an award for Best Cover, also for the Folio Society's edition of **Dune**. The Chesley Awards are managed by the Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists to recognise individual artistic works and achievements during a given year, and are named after **The Conquest of Space** illustrator Chesley Bonestell. The ceremony will be held at Worldcon 74 aka MidAmericon II in Kansas City, USA.

Barcelona Eurocon Sold Out

Perhaps it's a growing sign of the times, but tickets for 2016's Eurocon in Barcelona have sold out. Spain has a vibrant science fiction literature community and the response to Eurocon coming to the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona has been incredible. Featuring writers from across the continent, the programme looks both extensive and fun. If you've missed out, don't worry, next year's Eurocon is already planned and will be held at Dortmund, Germany. Time will tell if European fans will find 2017 as exciting.

Pratchett Wins Locus Award

The Locus Science Fiction Foundation announced the winners of the 2016 Locus Awards on Saturday, June 25th, 2016 during the Locus Awards Weekend in Seattle, WA. Best Young Adult Book went to Terry Pratchett's final novel, **The Shepherd's Crown**. Ann Leckie won best Science Fiction Novel for **Ancillary Mercy** and Naomi Novik won Best Fantasy Novel for **Uprooted**. George R. R. Martin and Gardner Dozois won for their anthology **Old Venus**, and promised not to release a sequel called **Old Uranus**.

European Publishers to Support UK Publishing Industry

The French Publishers Association and the board of Publishing Ireland have voiced their overwhelming support to the UK publishing industry following the results of the UK's EU referendum vote and other publishing groups from across the continent are expected to follow. British authors, including J. K. Rowling, Malorie Blackman, and Phillip Pullman have also voiced their dissatisfaction with the referendum result.

Sci-Fi Poetry Award Ties

The Rhysling Awards are handed out annually by the Science Fiction Poetry Association. This year, the award for Best Poem (Long) has resulted in a tie. The prize goes to both Krysada Panusith Phounsiri for **It Begins with a Haunting** and Ann K. Schwader for **Keziah**. The prize for Short Poem goes to Ruth Berman for **Time Travel Vocabulary Problems**. Our favourite is still last year's long form winner **100 Reasons to Have Sex with an Alien**.

Eugie Foster Memorialised with Award

Science fiction and fantasy writer Eugie Foster passed away in 2014, just as her writing career was beginning to take off. The Nebula-winning author has been memorialised with her own award, The Eugie Award, which will honour stories that are irreplaceable, that inspire, enlighten, and entertain. The awards will be announced at Dragon Con in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. The nominees are:

The Deepwater Bride by Tamsyn Muir
(Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, July/August 2015)

Hungry Daughters of Starving Mothers by Alyssa Wong
(Nightmare, October 2015)

The Long Goodnight of Violet Wild by Catherynne M. Valente
(Clarkesworld, January & March 2015)

Pocosin by Ursula Vernon
(Apex Magazine, January 2015)

Three Cups of Grief, by Starlight by Alette De Bodard
(Clarkesworld, Jan 2015)

Dan Brown Helps Occult Library Go Online

Dan Brown has donated €300,000 to the Ritman Library, also known as the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica in Amsterdam, in order to have the collection digitally preserved. The Ritman is a private library that houses one of the world's largest collections of occult tomes, housing 4,600 manuscripts on matters such as goetia, alchemy and mysticism. The author of **The Da Vinci Code** has stated that the collection has inspired his later works such as **The Lost Symbol** and **Inferno**.

STARBURST Launches BRAVE NEW WORDS Podcast

And finally, we are pleased to announce that our book podcast, **The BookWorm**, has been relaunched as the **Brave New Words** podcast. The new show will contain all the bookish banter you desire, and can be found on the STARBURST website.



Catch STARBURST's own book podcast, **Brave New Words**, via our website starburstmagazine.com and on twitter @radiobookworm.

COMING SOON



THE GRADUAL

AUTHOR: CHRISTOPHER PRIEST

PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 15TH

Christopher Priest is one of those genre authors who is positively dripping with awards and accolades. His previous works include **The Prestige**, which was turned into the movie of the same name. His latest book, **The Gradual**, follows the story of Alessandro Susken, a composer who lives in a country permanently at war. No one can map this mysterious country; the Dream Archipelago is a mysterious and unexplainable place. Alessandro's journey takes him beyond the impossible. Sounds well worth a read to us.



AFTER DARK

AUTHOR: JAMES LECK

PUBLISHER: KIDS CAN PRESS

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 1ST

A fifteen-year-old boy who's just moved to a small town, to help his mom fix a spooky old inn? Check. Unusual activity in the town? Check. An annoying neighbour with the surname of Helsing? Absolutely check. Of course, there's a school with all sorts of weird things going on as well; after all, this is a kid's book. Author James Leck hits all the right notes in this young adult novel: adventure, suspense, funny dialogue and, best of all, zombie vampires! An excellent introduction to the world of horror and silly supernatural fun for younger readers.



THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CABAL (JOHANNES CABAL NOVELS)

AUTHOR: JONATHAN L. HOWARD

PUBLISHER: THOMAS DUNNE BOOKS

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 27TH

Johannes Cabal returns in the fifth instalment of Jonathan L Howard's **Cabal** series. This time round, the notorious necromancer has found a hint that may lead him to his ultimate goal: a cure for death. The path is hazardous as it takes him into extraordinary uncharted and unseen territories. Along with the few friends he still has left - a devil, a vampire, and an academic - the party descends into Hell on Earth. Or as others call it: London. We expect page-turning horror and wry humour.



THE WOLVES OF LONDON

AUTHOR: MARK MORRIS

PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 30TH

Ex-convict and professional mind-bender Alex Locke is forced back into a life of crime when his daughter is threatened. A misadventure involving the mysterious Obsidian Heart leads to Locke crossing swords with a band of unearthly assassins known as the 'Wolves of London'. Our hero learns that the heart has the ability to transport him through time, and although it gives him a certain dark power, it also taints things. Sounds like a cracking bit of supernatural adventure to us.



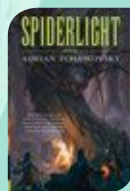
REVENGER

AUTHOR: ALASTAIR REYNOLDS

PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 15TH

Alastair Reynolds is best known for his hard science fiction, and his forthcoming book **Reverger** seems to mix hard science fiction with adventure fun. Set in a desolated solar system, it's a story of space pirates, buried treasure, and phantom weapons; of terrifying perils and dedicated bravery, murder, and retribution. Captain Rackamore and his crew are tasked with looking for small worlds that have been booby-trapped or enclosed with layers of fortification, and to penetrate them for the ancient relics and forgotten technologies that might be hidden.



SPIDERLIGHT

AUTHOR: ADRIAN TCHAIKOVSKY

PUBLISHER: TOR

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 2ND

The forces of Light have always battled the forces of Darkness. Prophecy has it that a band of unlikely heroes will defeat the Dark Lord Darvezian, armed only with the blessing of the Light, their cunning, and an artefact stolen from the heartless Spider Queen - because this is an Adrian Tchaikovsky and we should always expect spiders in very interesting ways. Tchaikovsky, the author of **Guns of the Dawn** and the **Shadows of the Apt** series has produced another fantasy world and tale of high adventure, and we're looking forward to seeing what he's done with this concept.



THE CALL

AUTHOR: PEADAR O'GUILIN

PUBLISHER: DAVID FICKLING BOOKS

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 1ST

What if you only had three minutes to save your own life? The heroes of O'Guilin's latest horror thriller live in fear of 'The Call'. Any day, they could wake up in a horrifying land, alone and afraid, isolated from friends and allies, and become hunted. **The Call** has already garnered a lot of praise from the professional publishing industry and we keep hearing that this will be an utterly gripping tale that grabs the reader and won't stop until the very last page. Certainly, Peadar O'Guilin's previous work has been deliciously scary, so fingers are crossed that this is more of the same.



FORGE OF WAR

AUTHORS: DAN ABNETT, IAN EDGINTON

PUBLISHER: GAMES WORKSHOP

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 31ST

Before we had the **Age of Sigmar**, we had the grim dark grittiness that is **Warhammer Fantasy**. **Forge of War** sets the forces of Chaos against Empire from the north. Greatsword Sergeant Franz Vogel is one of the few humans dumb enough to try and stop them. Can the soldier unite men, mages, and dwarfs to take the battle to the forces of Chaos? Will they survive the treacherous ancient forest to which they have escaped? Will they find liberation or everlasting damnation? Probably both, but it's going to be fun finding out.

BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK
OF GENRE FICTION
BY KATE FATHERS



There's something strange about Father Gregory Sargent's new parish. His placement was rather sudden. The old priest couldn't wait to get out of town. And one of his new parishioners, a sixteen-year-old girl named Susan, won't go anywhere near the church. Gregory is convinced the girl's problem is psychological, but the Bishop isn't so sure. In fact, the Bishop is convinced that the girl is possessed, and that it's up to Gregory to exorcise the Devil out of her.

If you were alive in the twentieth century, this plot is starting to sound very familiar. Even if you haven't read William Peter Blatty's book or seen the film, you know the story. You know the bare details. And you think Ray Russell must have known them too, and used them as an inspiration for his own work.

The interesting part? *The Case Against Satan* was published in 1962 - nine years before *The Exorcist*.

While its successor achieved great

success both in print and on the big screen, audiences were less kind to *The Case Against Satan*. Which is odd, given how scarily similar they are. Both books are about the satanic possession of a young girl from a single parent family. Both books have an old priest and a young, troubled priest seeking to help her. Both have the troubled priest experience a crisis of faith. And both books culminate in a brutal, swear-laden exorcism that tests everyone involved. They were even likely influenced by the same event, the exorcism of Roland Doe, as one of the priests shares a surname with Russell's character Father Halloran. But the devil's in the details (pun completely intended), and I think one of the big reasons for *The Exorcist*'s success is that it's much more dramatic than *The Case Against Satan*. While Russell's book is disturbing, as talk of incest and murder should be, in some ways it is very tame. A prime example of this is Russell's decision

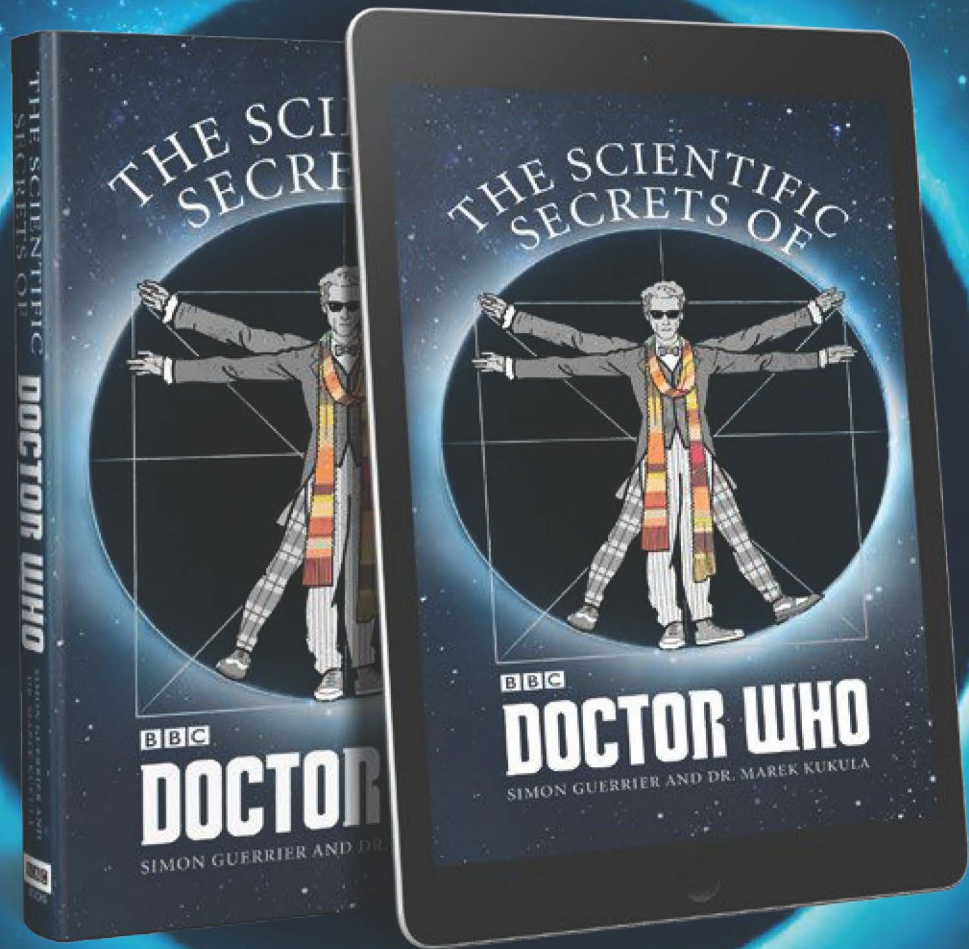
to have the possessed Susan swear at Gregory and the Bishop, but instead of saying 'shit' (which would have been sharp and shocking), she says 'dung'. It does not have the same effect. Overall, Russell's novel is very contained and reflective, with Susan's trouble and the resulting exorcism being only one part of the story.

When you set aside its relationship to *The Exorcist*, *The Case Against Satan* is an excellent horror story. Russell's prose is clean and accessible, which allows the action to feel vivid and immediate. His characters are clearly drawn, although they do occasionally err on the side of two-dimensional. He also uses this story to debate science and religion, as well as the nature of faith. Gregory approaches Susan's problem from a very modern, scientific position. He is convinced that Susan's issues can be solved with psychiatry, and even after the exorcism he still rationalises what happened using science. The Bishop, on the other hand, is the voice of religion. He even goes so far as to say that, just like you can use science to explain the supernatural, so can the supernatural be used to explain science. Their conversations are fascinating and complex, as Russell goes to great lengths to ensure that nothing in this book is black and white. While Gregory favours rationality, he is still a spiritual man. The Bishop may be a staunch supporter of heavenly powers, but he also has room for earthly ideas and explanations. Russell writes so many amazing layers into what might otherwise have been a simple scary story, and it works so well.

There is, however, one thing I wish Russell had paid more attention to: the finale. A lot happens over the course of the novel, and even once the exorcism is over things still look pretty grim. Townspeople are suspicious, unpleasant truths have come to light, and there's been a death; I was anxious to see how these things would be resolved! And then Russell jumps ahead a few months, and barely touches on those issues. It's such a disappointing end to what is otherwise a fantastic book, and as a reader, you feel like you've missed out on the *complete* conclusion to the story. It's one thing to have an ambiguous ending, it's another to have dangling or unsatisfying plotlines.

The Case Against Satan may not be anything new, and it may not be perfect, but it is well worth your time. It should be remembered alongside *The Exorcist* as one of the great examples of exorcism in horror fiction, and read just as much as that old favourite. Ray Russell also authored other horror pieces, including the Gothic horror *Sardonicus* and its screenplay. ✦

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REVIEWS

THE LATEST RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



THE ART OF DOOM

EDITOR: IAN TUCKER / PUBLISHER: DARK HORSE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Ultra-violent and unrelenting, Bethesda and id Software's Doom has been a huge hit with fans. Returning to its explosive roots, the new Doom features its trademark design and atmosphere of terror. Thankfully for fans

of this visceral horror shooter, Dark Horse provides an exclusive look into its concepts in their new book, *The Art of Doom*.

Lavishly produced in an oversized hardcover, *The Art of Doom* features five different chapters full of never before seen concepts, focusing on demons, environments and weapons. Edited by Ian Tucker, the book is certain to please fans of the series.

An introduction from executive producer Marty Stratton and creative director Hugo Martin promises an in-depth look into their production of Doom, which they quote gushes "personality and a sense of humour". As readers can easily tell from the direction of Doom, they've managed to capture the look and feel of the old game whilst injecting this new hyper-realism into it.

The art book has an impressive range of concept designs, going from the very first stages of character development sketches, to complete final renders. The renders alone provide a whole new appreciation for the effort put into the iconic shooter, as it shows us how far video gaming has truly come in recent years.

Doom has always been recognised for its unique landscapes, and that part of the book boasts around 80 pages of beautifully put together scenery. For some reason, a few landscape concepts have been blown up across double page spreads, resulting in a slightly pixelated image. Unfortunately,

that's rather common with Dark Horse's art compilations.

Still, the book is carefully crafted to showcase a decent variety of what went into the video game. Character designs are a delight to look at too, with a showcase on the characters used in the troubled multiplayer mode. Another of the many highlights is a look at the unique demon, Pinky.

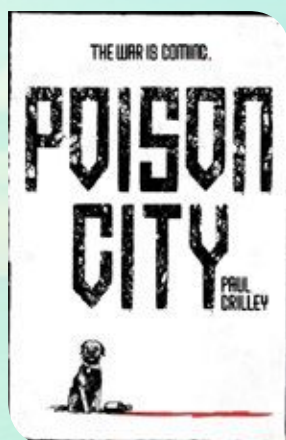
Despite the introductions from the art team, it still feels like the book could have benefitted from annotations explaining the design process of several concepts. Admiring the imagery is one thing, but some further insight into the developmental process would help fully realise the artists' vision.

The book also feels like it's missing information about the game's lore, especially throughout its later chapters. A few pages focusing on Hell is great for fans, but perhaps an exploration of its main themes would improve on the contents.

Nonetheless, it's still a worthy purchase for fans of the video game. *The Art of Doom* might feel like it could do with a little more content, but it's still chock-full of awesome concept designs that will keep art book aficionados happy.

MATT WELLS

★★★★★★★+ 8



POISON CITY

AUTHOR: PAUL CRILLEY / PUBLISHER: HODDER & STOUGHTON / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 11TH

Gideon Tau is no ordinary cop. He works for Delphic Division, the occult investigative unit of the South African Police Service, dealing with the supernatural crimes committed in

the city of Durban and its environs. Like all good literary detectives, he's a tortured soul still coming to grips with the events of his past, specifically the loss of a child. When his latest case reveals that his daughter's killer is involved, Gideon must make a tough choice; - pursue his need for revenge, or take his place in a titanic battle against evil?

Poison City kicks off with a killer first line, starting at a relentless pace. Initially, it feels like an early Tarantino version of an urban fantasy, with some outrageous banter between Gideon and the dog that is not only his spirit guide but an unruly drunk to boot. As Gideon's investigation proceeds, it drags him deeper into what proves to be an epic conflict between good and evil; there are angels, demons, bad language, violence and gore, but author Paul Crilley never loses sight of the humanity, imbuing Gideon with faults and desires that are all too recognisable. He's damaged goods, but sympathetic, bringing a tone of wry cynicism to the entire novel that helps set him apart from the inevitable comparison.

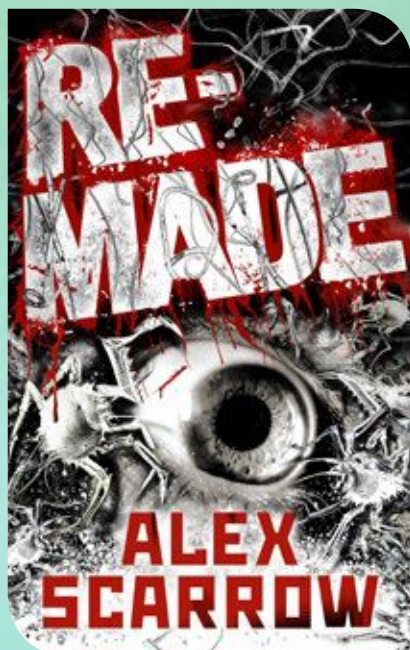
The book maintains its pace throughout, insisting to be read in the minimum number

of sittings. Sometimes, this can be to its detriment, as the emotional scenes may not linger as much as they possibly should. Even the moments when Gideon is looking at information on a computer or inspecting a crime scene possess the same taut prose, the short sentences that make it like a literary version of high-octane '80s movies.

If that is a sign of an author eager to tell his story, who can blame him? It's an absolute cracker, one that has a satisfying number of twists, a supporting cast that are as well-realised as the narrator, and a conclusion that not only whets the appetite for the second book in the series, but pays off everything that has gone before to leave the reader satisfied. *Poison City* is Crilley's debut adult novel, a book that isn't for the easily offended and, while it can be challenging at times, is ultimately rewarding and entertaining. The war is coming, says the cover; given this first battle, it's going to be one hell of a ride.

ALISTER DAVIDSON

★★★★★★★+ 8



REMADE

AUTHOR: ALEX SCARROW / PUBLISHER: MACMILLAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Tastes appear to be changing in the volatile world of 'Young Adult' publishing. Futuristic dystopian adventures such as the Hunger Games and Divergent series seem to have run their course, replaced by tougher, more contemporary tales of human survival in the face of overwhelming catastrophe. Stand-out titles which have already found favour

include Charlie Higson's The Enemy series, Darren Shan's Zom-B books and Tim Lebbon's tremendous The Silence, - books which depict the collapse of mankind seen through the wide eyes of a teenage protagonist, in a much more readily recognisable real world setting. Now along comes Remade by Alex Scarrow, previously best known for his popular TimeRiders sequence (although he has already dabbled with the apocalypse in gritty titles like Last Light and After Light). Remade is, however, a more gruesome and occasionally disturbing affair altogether... and it's apparently intended for kids.

Sixteen-year-old Leon is struggling to adapt to a new life back in London with his sister Grace and their mother, who has split acrimoniously from their father back in New Jersey. Worrying reports of a fatal new virus in Africa - quickly dismissed as neither Ebola nor Marburg or any of the usual exotic suspects - quickly escalate and it becomes clear that something is very seriously amiss. The virus rapidly spreads across Europe and society begins to collapse in on itself with a terrifying speed. But this is no typical plague-like virus; this new infection is sentient. It attacks its victims and breaks them down into their constituent elements - they literally dissolve into jelly and gloop - and then starts to recreate a new form of life from the genomes and DNA and assorted sciencey bits it has absorbed. Leon and his family decide to flee London as quickly as possible. But inevitably they're not quite quick enough...

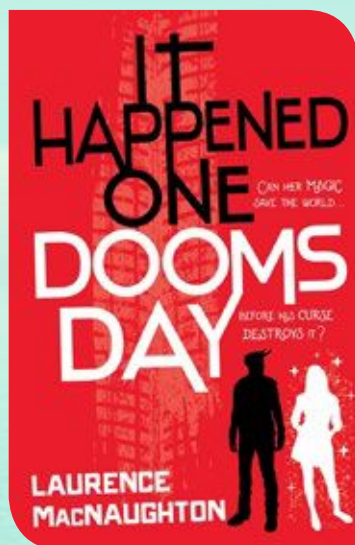
Remade is a tough and often

stomach-troublingly graphic read. This is apocalyptic fiction resolutely not dumbed down for its target audience; with its vivid and numerous descriptions of the agonies of the effects of the virus and the hideous liquefaction of its victims, this is not one for youngsters of a nervous disposition. It's hard, uncompromising and it takes no prisoners in its descriptions of the world coming to an end in a very unpleasant manner. Leon and his family eventually find solace with another survivor in a nuclear bunker but it's a short-lived respite and before long Leon and Grace fetch up at an occupied leisure park complex which initially seems to provide the sanctuary they've been seeking. But, as ever in these society-collapsing situations, sometimes sanctuary becomes a frying pan/fire situation...

Remade ends the world quietly - literally with a whimper - and the emphasis is on character over spectacle; there are no real large scale cinematic set pieces here, just frightened people left alive in a frightening world. The ending is genuinely shocking - some might suggest it goes a bit too far for a kid's book - and the way is paved for the upcoming sequel, which we await with some anticipation. Crisply and confidently written and never less than compelling even in its ickier sequences, Remade is unreservedly recommended - but for youngsters and adults with strong stomachs and sturdy constitutions only.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★★★ 9



IT HAPPENED ONE DOOMSDAY

AUTHOR: LAURENCE MACNAUGHTON / PUBLISHER: PYR / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Dru is a minor sorceress eking out a living selling magical crystals and charms to anyone who wanders into her tiny store,

while epic battles against the forces of darkness rage unseen elsewhere. In walks the cursed but ruggedly hunky Greyson and Dru is suddenly thrust into a ceaseless race to prevent the end of days from being unleashed upon an unsuspecting world.

Unlike many fantasy authors who spend a sizable chunk of their work crafting an elaborate world of painstaking detail, MacNaughton instead launches directly into a fast-moving tale that barely relents until its final pages. There is still the feel of a larger magical underworld out there, but it will be for any subsequent volumes in the series to start exploring it in any way.

The chapters are short and quick blasts of action - they feel a little like the issues of a comic book series - and keep things rattling along at a swift but nevertheless sustainable pace, so much so that the reader is almost as perpetually bewildered at the speed of developments as Dru is. The apocalyptic shenanigans the title promises take a while to fully materialise, but once they do a greater sense of urgency is added to proceedings, and the already high gear of the tale is kicked into overdrive.

As the story uses the simplest of urban fantasy setups - magic exists only

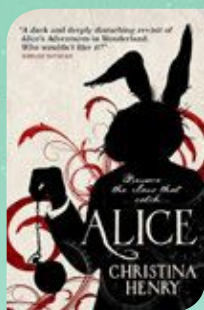
a few can use it most don't believe in it - much of the true extent of everything that's out there remains only vaguely sketched, but the realisations of demonic antagonists are suitably creepy and signify enough imagination that we can expect to encounter more than basic mythological creatures later on in the series.

Other than the central duo of Dru and Greyson, the few characters along for the ride, such as snarky shapeshifting warrior Rane and Dru's ever-practical assistant Opal, are interesting enough to keep you engaged and likeable enough that you care about what happens to them. The relentless dynamo of the book's structure means that some necessary characterisation gets lost amidst the frenetic chaos, leaving some late character revelations without the required level of development, but it doesn't detract too much from the fun of the rest of the story.

It Happened One Doomsday is a simple and straightforward read that doesn't tax brain power in any way but is also a fast and fun ride that keeps you entertained all the way through its unyielding mayhem.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★★★★★★★ 7



ALICE

AUTHOR: CHRISTINA HENRY
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Deep in a dark room within a hospital, there is a young woman whose name is Alice. She doesn't know why she's been put in such a terrible place,

surrounded by padded walls and the screams of demented souls. All she can remember is the Rabbit, and those memories aren't pleasant at all...

So begins Alice, by Christina Henry, who has taken the Alice in Wonderland story and manipulated it into a dark, brutal and often disturbing tale of her own. There have been many variations on the same theme over the decades, but Henry's vision gets under the skin right from the start, creating a deep sense of unease within the first few lines. Her Alice isn't the corn-haired innocent that Carroll readers will be familiar with; instead, she's damaged and tormented by the events of her past, a woman who is forced to team with a homicidal maniac

in order to escape their prison.

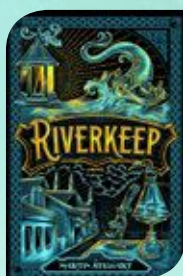
Many writers have imitated Carroll's prose style with varying degrees of success, but Henry pays homage to Alice's creator through seemingly familiar characters that, in her hands, become darker aspects of their former selves. Rather than curiosity, it's a palpable sense of menace that pervades the book from start to finish; Alice's escape from the asylum has also freed a monster, one that torments from afar, leaving bloody corpses in its wake, but gets closer with each turn of the page.

Author Christina Henry has created something incredibly unique here, a book that manages to respect its source material, while twisting it enough to make it unexpected. The story is by no means

simple; it delves deep into the psychology of its characters, keeping Alice's past a mystery until the very end, peeling away layers of clues to both protagonist and reader as the chapters fly by. It's a book that insists on being read in a single sitting, packed with jeopardy and moments of emotion, a story that brings its characters to the fore, ensuring it's their needs that drive the narrative, rather than plodding from one encounter to the next. Often violent, but always captivating, Alice is a dark delight that will leave readers satisfied, yet still longing for more from this talented writer.

ALISTER DAVISON

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



RIVERKEEP

AUTHOR: MARTIN STEWART
PUBLISHER: PENGUIN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It is fair to say that Penguin have a lot of confidence in their new author Martin Stewart. Despite Riverkeep being his debut work, the publicity material surrounding this well-hyped novel is happy to mention him in the same bracket as tried-and-tested luminaries

of Young Adult literature like Neil Gaiman, Phillip Pullman, and Patrick Ness. So is this comparison too quick to judge or perfectly apt?

The book focuses on 15-year-old Wulliam, who is the reluctant 'Riverkeep'; the lone soul tasked with tending to the waters and fishing corpses out of the depths. However, when his father is possessed by a dark water spirit, he must journey further than he has ever gone before to capture a fearsome mythological sea beast – the mormorach, which is said to be able to cure his Pappa's illness. In short, it's The Wizard of Oz by way of Moby Dick.

For anyone who loves a good old-fashioned quest narrative, this is a real treat. Stewart's prose is atmospheric and evocative, and the never-ending

river - with its neighbouring lands and inhabitants - makes for an engaging setting. World-building is not a major part of the novel, but it works in the story's favour to leave the supernatural elements of this place mostly without explanation. Likewise, many of the characters are well-written and colourful. Wull's infected father, for instance, is simultaneously heart-breaking and terrifying, not unlike the foul-mouthed Father Jack off Father Ted. However, the book's MVP has got to be Mr Tillinghast, a Frankenstein's monster version of Oz's Scarecrow, with a sense of humour as blue as his face.

On the other hand, the story is a little slow to start and the adventure you are reading the book for doesn't really begin until a third of the way in. As such, there is a juxtaposition of tone;

the book's first act is more of a grim horror story, while the rest is lighter and faster-paced. Once it gets going, though, Stewart has a strong handle on the material, as the book seamlessly segues between moments of levity and bleakness. Seriously, there is a lot of death in this novel. In terms of characters grieving for lost loved ones and actual rotting cadavers.

So was the high praise deserved? With Riverkeep, Stewart has come out of the gate running and, though the book isn't completely faultless, it is a very impressive début which suggests great things to come for the writer. Upon the basis of this novel, we look forward to seeing what they are.

CHRISTIAN BONE

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



AND I DARKEN

AUTHOR: KIERSTEN WHITE
PUBLISHER: CORGI CHILDRENS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Dracula has been done to death by now, hasn't it? We've seen so many different versions of good old Vlad that it's rare to see an original take on the character. And I Darken pulls off this minor

miracle with a simple and clever approach. This is an origin story that begins with the birth of a would-be monster, but rather than Vlad, the child is Lada Dragwlya. Much to the disgust of the father, this baby is a girl, and yet as it turns out, every inch the monster we expect.

There's a current cliché in young adult books that the main character has to be strong and female. Yet one of the more common mistakes is to mistake the idea of 'strong' with violent and uncompromising, creating instead a rather bland and generic character who has no interesting perspective on the world. And I Darken tackles this cliché head on, not by weakening its lead, but by tackling the consequences of being stubborn

in a dangerous world.

Lada (along with her brother Radu) grows up in a difficult world. Her father is a cruel and vicious man, and sadly not a terribly clever one. It's tough to be a king in 15th century Transylvania, after all. Radu is clever, sensitive and smart. Lada, seeking the approval of her father, is powerful, pragmatic and cruel. As the pair mature, they both learn important lessons in power, and the book explores the different uses of strength, from the power of a well-placed word to the utility of the fist. The story is quickly paced, and balance the themes of politics, religion and self-awareness are balanced throughout the tale.

As a protagonist, Lada is not

terribly sympathetic, but she is very, very believable and utterly compelling. The reader is caught up in her every love, every hate and every broken trust. As the mighty Ottoman Empire twists and changes and Lada and her family struggle to find their place in the world, it's impossible not to feel for Lada. Though the book is marketed as an 'Anti-Princess' tale, it isn't really. This is a story of a strong person who tries to take on the world without truly understanding how much of themselves they will have to sacrifice to achieve that goal. It's a great read, and we're looking forward to the inevitable sequel.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★★ 8

New titles available from Bee Books

THE ELECTRIC

By Andrew David Barker

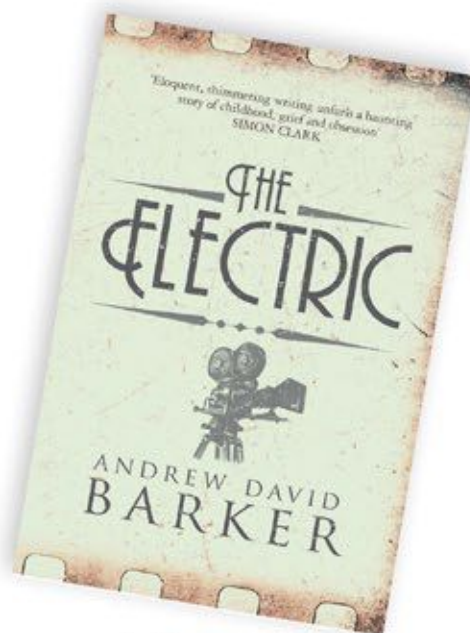
The Electric. A crumbling shrine to the art of film, the abandoned cinema lies empty in the outskirts of town.

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Australian JAY KRISTOFF is a New York Times and internationally bestselling author of fantasy and science fiction. He is best known for his ILLUMINAE series. We caught up with him to find out more about his new book, NEVERNIGHT...

STARBURST: Tell us about *Nevernight*...

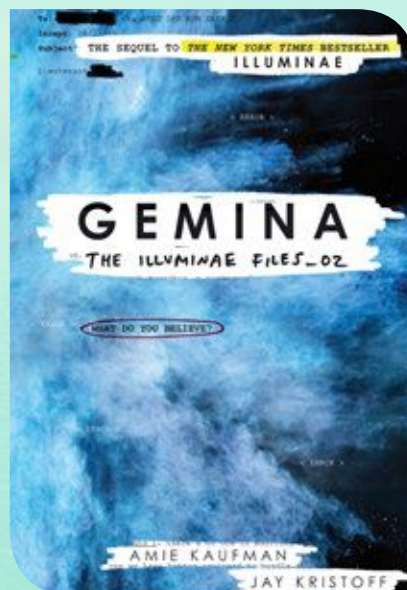
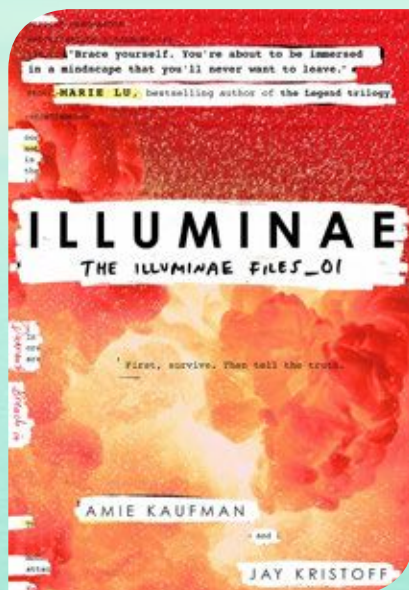
Jay Kristoff: It's the first in a trilogy. It's an epic fantasy series set in a world with three suns. With the suns being what they are, it's never actually nighttime, hence the name of the book. The only gets darkness once every three or so years. I had an astrophysicist buddy of mine design a trinary star system that holds true. The story centres around a girl called Mia, who is the daughter of a failed revolutionary. She seeks training at a school of assassins to avenge herself against her father's killers.

How does *Nevernight* differ from the *Lotus War* series?

The Lotus War was steampunk mash up, set in a world inspired by a feudal Japan. The technology was based on a fuel source that was a little like fossil fuels in our own world. So they had blimps and chainsaw katanas and samurai power armour and what-not. This setting, *Nevernight*, is a little more traditional Euro-centric medieval fantasy. It's kind of a cross between ancient Rome and *Merchant Prince Venice*. The city at the heart of the novel is called God's Grave,

an analogue of Venice. It's got a series of islands, burst with canals. At the heart of it are The Ribs, big towers of ossified bone. Through the name of the city you

can surmise that it's built around the grave of a god by no one is quite sure of the origins of the myth anymore, it happened so far back in history.



Why are Australian fantasy writers always killing gods?

I don't know! In *Nevernight*, things are muddled and lost in the depths of time. People don't quite know why things are the way they are. There are legends about why there is no night, and why the sun dominates the sky. The God of Light and the suns in the sky are his eyes, constantly looking out at people. He's supposed to be a protector god, but the flipside of that is you get constant climate effects and you don't get to sleep because you don't know when it's nighttime. You get enormous storms blowing off the sea every 24 hours, which is the only way life would be possible on a world bathed in sunlight. The idea that this god is beneficent is constantly questioned. How this world came to be and how night became banished is part of the overall meta-plot of the novel.

The idea of God's Grave came to me first and then I built the world around it. I don't think I have any problem with the gods that live in my head.

You're best known for the Young Adult series, *Illuminae*. How does this contrast?

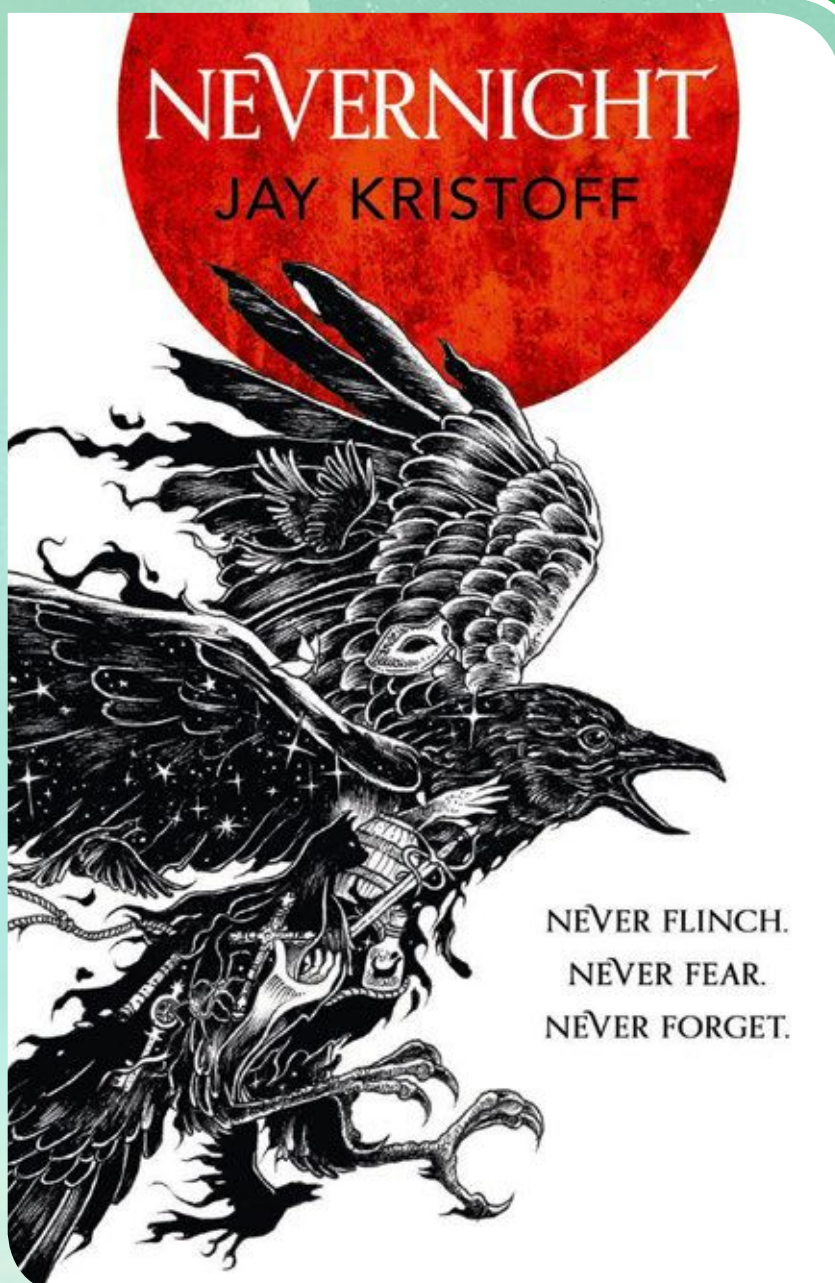
Well, *Illuminae* is science fiction, this is a fantasy novel. *Nevernight* has more violence and a little bit more sex. It's aimed at the more mature end of the spectrum. Younger readers can get into it, the main protagonist is a sixteen-year-old girl, so we'll get a crossover in readership. It's a little darker in tone, a little bit more serious. It's about a school for assassins, so expect some violence and mayhem along the way.

Can you tell us anything about the *Illuminae* movie?

They're looking for screenwriters. The thing about signing an option for film is that you really do surrender all kind of control of your work over to people. Which is why it's important you sign it over to people that you trust. Plan B is an amazing company that has done incredible films. They're obviously excellent filmmakers. You also surrender being in on the loop. Screenwriting is a very different process to writing a novel, so you kind of have to take a step back and let things develop at their own pace.

Why are stories about assassins so popular nowadays?

As far as society's fascination with assassins, I don't know. It's a question that I've thought about a lot. To me, the challenge as a writer was to make an assassin that the reader could still sympathise with. As far as a vocation goes, killing people solely for money is about an evil act as you can commit. So trying to have someone who does that, whilst still being an interesting and compelling character was a real challenge for me. The book started with a scene in my head, I think it's the end of Chapter Five, which is a conversation with Mia and Trick.



From that conversation, I just wanted to find out more about the character. I think we have a fondness in our hearts for antiheroes and Mia is definitely an antihero. She's not on a quest to save the world, she's driven by really quite selfish goals, she wants to avenge herself against the people who wronged her. Finding out about those people and what their motives were and her realising her father wasn't such a great guy is part of her journey. Exploring those themes, those motivations and exploring her selfishness was really fun.

We can't really talk about fantasy assassins without mentioning Robin Hobb; how has she inspired your work?

She's a massive influence. *Assassin's Apprentice* is one of my favourite books of all time. I've still got my paperback

copy that I bought back in 1997 pride of place on my bookshelf right now. Robin is an amazing writer, Fitz is an incredible character and I think the *Farseer* series is indelibly part of the epic fantasy landscape. I think anyone who writes a book about an assassin is going to be compared to Robin's work. But she's brilliant, if anyone tells me that they see similarities between *The Farseer Trilogy* and the *Nevernight Chronicle*, I'll take that as a huge compliment. Robin is a huge influence on me and I think many other fantasy writers. It's impossible to avoid comparisons. Same with Arya and *Game of Thrones*, such a compelling character. I welcome any comparisons.

ED FORTUNE

***NEVERNIGHT* is released via Harper Voyager on August 11th.**



STARBURST talks to the writer of some of the scariest recent fiction released...

The old adage says that truth is stranger than fiction, but where Nuzo Onoh's latest novel *The Sleepless* is concerned, truth and fiction often bear terrifying similarities to one another.

Nuzo was born in Enugu, in the Eastern part of Nigeria. Enugu was, for a very brief period, the capital of the Republic of Biafra, a secessionist state that was horrifically ripped apart by war during 1967 – 1970. Nuzo was only a small child during the Biafran War, just like Obele – the main character in *The Sleepless* – and, like Obele, she encountered violent death and tribal superstition on a daily basis. But the parallels between Nuzo and Obele don't stop there, as we were to discover during our conversation.

Now living in the UK, Nuzo holds a Law degree and an MA in Creative Writing from Warwick University. She also runs her own independent publishing house, Canaan-Star, and occasionally writes under the pseudonym Alex Stranger-Onoh. But it

is writing horror fiction under her own name that Nuzo is most passionate about. African horror is an exciting new genre steeped in malevolent spirits, restless ghosts and dark witchcraft, and Nuzo has already been described as its queen. On the basis of *The Sleepless* and her previous novels *The Reluctant Dead* and *Unhallowed Graves*, that title is very well earned indeed.

STARBURST: Are all your books tied into your experiences of Biafra?

Nuzo Onoh: No, only *The Sleepless*. For me, *The Sleepless* was like a personal exorcism. It's something that's been in my head for ever and ever. Whatever I'm writing, I always find Biafra hovering like a ghost at the edge of the page, so I finally said to myself that I had to tackle it, I had to go down that route because I experienced the war through the eyes of a child and I had to get everything that was inside me out of my system. But I knew, when I eventually sat down to write about it, that it would take the form of a ghost story. That's what all my books are

about, ghosts and hauntings.

The underpinning of reality definitely makes *The Sleepless* more powerful. In many ways, the terrible realities of what happens to Obele in her 'real' life equal the horrors that are confronting her supernaturally.

Exactly. Because war is a harrowing thing, and people don't realise that children who live in the war also understand the war. As a child, you see so much that the adults don't see because the dads are all gone, all the men are gone, and you're left with mothers and old people who are busy panicking and struggling and, as a child, you're just left to your own devices. I remember there was literally no supervision; as children, we just wandered around and in our minds we made up our own new realities. You stumble across a dead body in the road and you make up stories about it. It's hard to explain.

Your writing is occasionally very graphic and there are some descriptions that, when you read them, are so deeply unsettling they really get behind your eyes...

I don't set out to make people uncomfortable, honestly – I'm just writing from a place of experience! But if you read other African women writers, you probably wouldn't find my writing so graphic. Most African women writers, if they went down the horror route, would be told they are possessed. I don't do churches anymore but if a pastor ever read anything I've written, I swear to you that by now I would be having another exorcism!

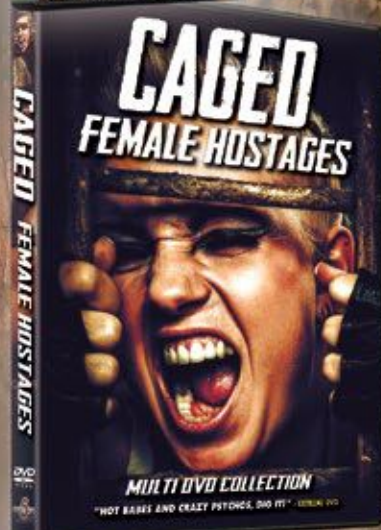
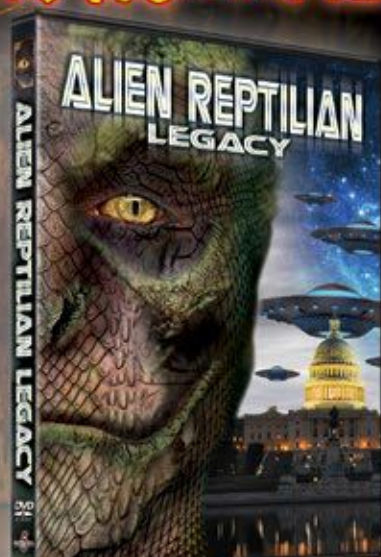
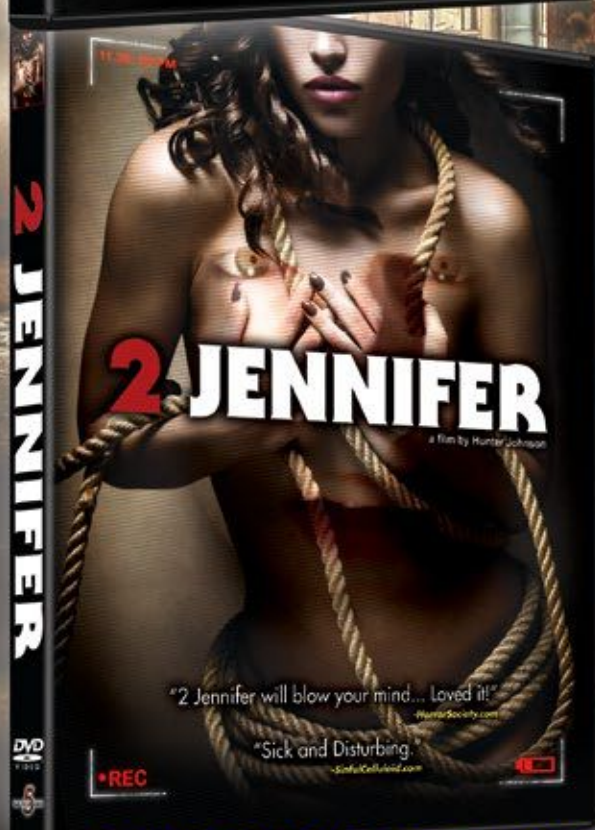
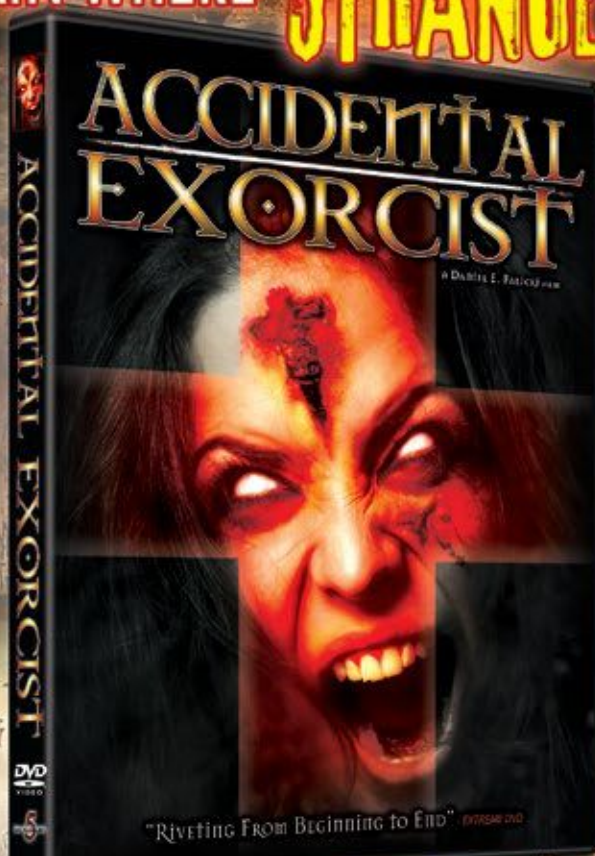
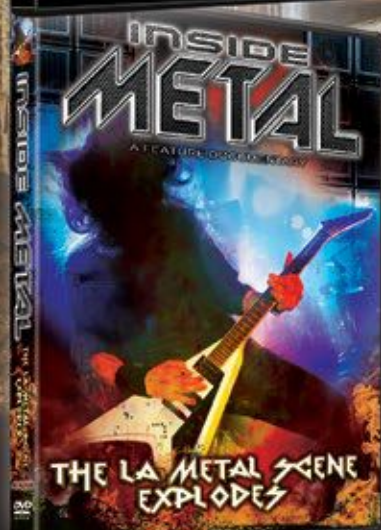
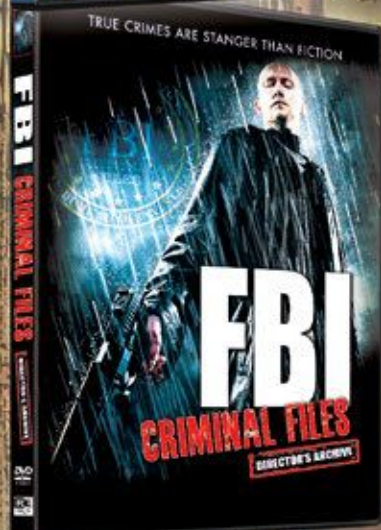
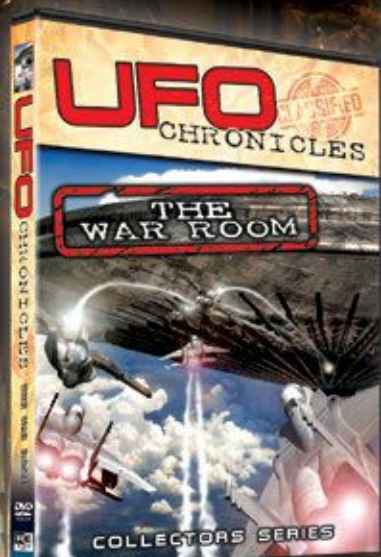
And, of course, reading something that puts you on edge is also a big reason why many of us read horror. But even for hardened horror fans, there's a sacrifice at the beginning of the book it's hard not to be affected by...

Because you're praying the little boy doesn't get killed. But I said to myself 'if I don't let him get killed, then I'm not being true to what really happens'. Child ritualistic murder is an everyday thing. When I was growing up, whenever the elections started in Nigeria my parents would stop us from going out. After school, we had to wait until the car was there to pick us up, you don't walk home, because that's when the politicians would kidnap children for their ritualistic murders. So there are certain periods when the kidnapping and sacrificing of children is high, and I said to myself 'should I let the little boy survive that experience?' and then I decided no, because that wouldn't be true, because in the real sense he wouldn't.

IAN WHITE

***THE SLEEPLESS* is published by Canaan-Star and is out now. You can read more from this interview online at starburstmagazine.com.**

ENTER A DOMAIN WHERE **STRANGE IS NORMAL**

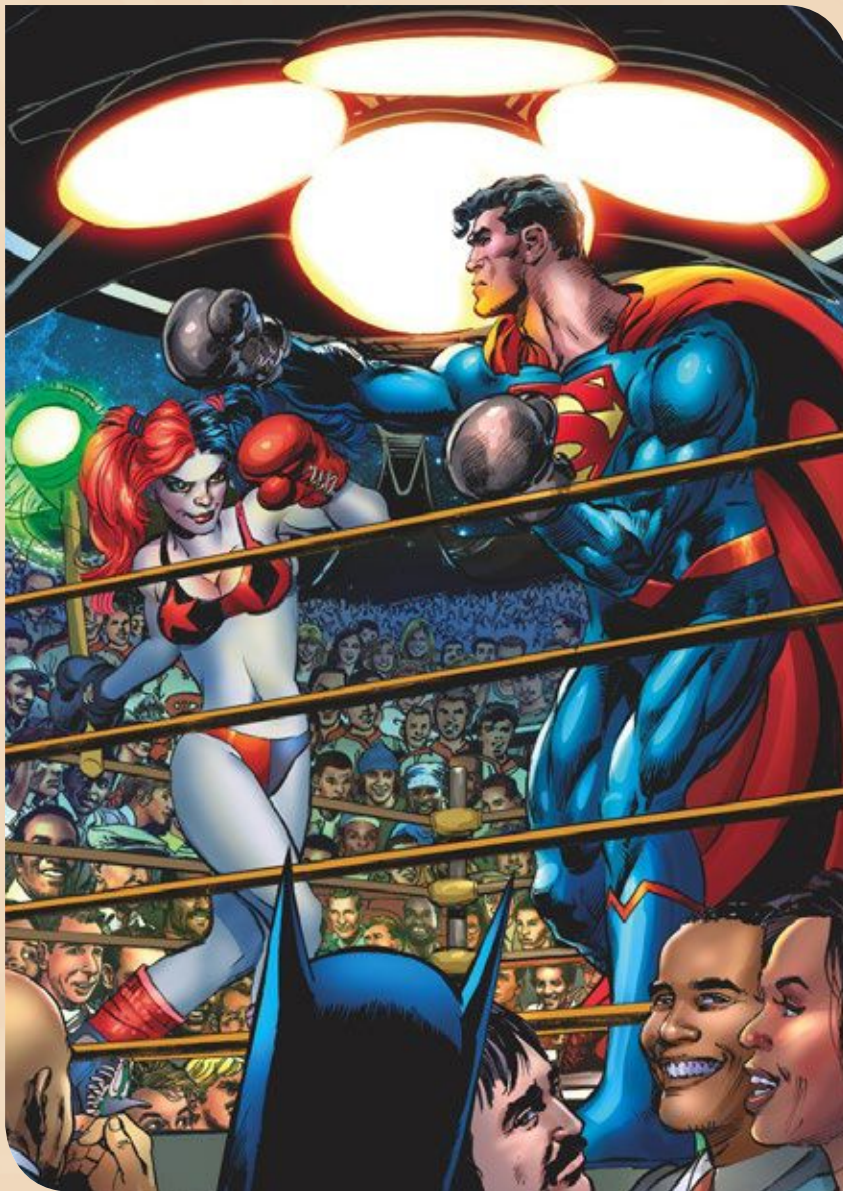


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VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

JOEL HARLEY PULLS MONITOR DUTY TO BRING YOU THE LATEST FROM THE WORLD OF COMIC BOOKS



returns Red Skull to top tier villainy with a dastardly plan that broke Twitter with its outrage for at least a week.

There's no backtracking on DC's big *Watchmen* reveal from last month, but no major developments on it either. As Batman and Barry Allen get down to some good old-fashioned detective work on finding out who was responsible for five years of the 'New 52' and stealing the old guard's memories (we all know it's Doctor Manhattan, keep up, Bats), *Rebirth* sets up and elaborates elsewhere, with clarified origin stories for Wonder Woman and Aquaman and a cheerier, happier Superman at the centre of it all (plus a Lois Lane marriage and, yes, a son. Less annoying than the *Superman Returns* kid, though). Hero a bit too stuck in the past? Just call on Wally West, who can now use the speed force to revive memories of past lives, allowing them to escape the 'New 52' rut.

The big news out of the way, we take a closer look at future longboxes to inspect some of the specifics. Marvel's *New Avengers* becomes something a little bit different, retooling themselves in the red, white, and blues as the U.S. *Avengers*. The team will consist of Sunspot, Squirrel Girl, an Iron Patriot, Pod, a Captain America variant from the future (Danielle Cage, of Luke Cage and Jessica Jones parentage), and Red Hulk, teaming up to fight a big bad named the Golden Skull (also from the future). Expect patriotism, and expect it this autumn.

She's a busy girl, that Squirrel. Squirrel Girl will also be appearing in *Deadpool* team-up book *Too Soon*, in which Marvel's most Tumblr/Marvel Universe Rocks My World-shared characters join forces to investigate the death of B-list hero The Forbush Man (powers include wearing a pan on his head). The very *Guardians*-centric line-up includes *Deadpool*, Squirrel Girl, Rocket Raccoon, Groot, Howard the Duck, and Spider-Pig, although Ant-Man and the Punisher can also be seen in the promo material. Written by Joshua Corbin and illustrated by Todd Nauck, *Deadpool: Too Soon* #1 is available now.

As I so often do in a semi-sarcastic sort of way, we segue from *Deadpool* to his DC equivalent, Harley Quinn, who is set to headline a revival of the classic Superman vs Muhammad Ali story *Superman vs Muhammad Ali*. With Mister Ali sadly no longer with us, that certainly does *not* mean we'll be seeing Harley Quinn beat up on the legendary boxer - instead pitting her against, well, Superman. No, really. *Harley's Little Black Book* #5 will restage the famous boxing match, with aliens forcing the Man

Previously on **View from the Watchtower**: Steve Rogers, Hydra Agent. Doctor Manhattan and the Watchmen, an official part of the DC Universe, and responsible for the last five years of comic book history (way to shift the blame, DC). Big revelations, much shock. This month, the aftermath, cause, effect... and even more big revelations. Let's dive right in, shall we?

Hail Hydra... but not really. In news presumably everybody will have seen coming, there's been a very quick backtrack on the infamous Steve Rogers: Agent of

Hydra story from last month. Because, of course, Captain America hasn't been working for Hydra/the Nazis all along (although it's worth pointing out that Hydra aren't *really* the Nazis). Keep up folks, this is comics. This coincides masterfully with the resurgence to power of supervillain the Red Skull, revealed to have been pulling the strings on this apparent defection from behind the scenes. Implanted memories and a sentient Cosmic Cube are revealed to have been responsible in *Captain America: Steve Rogers* #2, out now. Got you talking though, didn't it? And it



of Steel to fight Quinn in the ring. Amanda Conner and Jimmy Palmiotti will write the book as per usual, but the big selling point is the art, by no less than Neal Adams. Adams admits to pretty much only doing it for the money, but we can at least be assured that it'll look good, issues of taste aside. The (Kryptonite) mallet is present and accounted for, but Neal hasn't done anything about Harley's stupid wardrobe – if anything, she appears to be wearing even *less* here. And there's Superman lugging along even his cape for the fight. However you feel about it, *Harley's Little Black Book #5* will be on sale this August.

Outside of the Big Two, there are a number of fairly major developments which should have comics fans salivating. First up, the news that Mark Millar is bringing back *Kick-Ass*. No, not another Hit Girl spin-off, but the green and yellow wetsuit itself. Granted, Dave Lizewski is not the man in the suit this time... and nor is it even a man in the suit. In news few would have expected from the shock jock of comics, Millar is bringing a little diversity to 'Millarworld' or the 'Millaverse', putting a black lady behind the mask. Millar said "I don't think many blonde white guys around 30 feel under-represented when they pick up a comic or watch a movie. Being older or younger or female or African-American just seems more interesting to me as a writer because this character is quite unique and opens up story possibilities that haven't been tried in almost eighty years of superhero fiction. This woman has a completely different take on *Kick-Ass*." Whichever way it plays out, it's a sharp, timely idea, and will be worth a look-in, at least. Original series artist John Romita Jr. also returns for *Kick-Ass: The New Girl*, which will debut in January, before Millar hands the reins over to writer Daniel Way.

Potentially even bigger news than that, though: Dave Sim brings back *Cerebus*! The cult character is set to return for the four-issue miniseries *Cerebus in Hell*, launching



in early 2017. Where has the little grey Eeyore wannabe been since we saw him last, twelve years ago? Yes, dead, but the book will explore his time in Hell, celebrating the character's 40th anniversary. A #0 issue one-shot is also promised to arrive this September, serving as a little taster before the main course.

As England's very own *2000 AD* prepares for its landmark 2000th issue, details have been released of the line-up for the celebration. As you'd expect, a bumper issue is promised (48 pages!), taking in some of its most prominent creators. Brian Bolland, Mick McMahon, Dave Gibbons, and Kevin O' Neill are all said to return for Prog 2000, which will feature the first sequential art by Bolland for *2000 AD* since 1987 (bound to be a *Dredd* story) and a brand new series by Peter Milligan. Buying your comics through Diamond Distribution? An exclusive Glenn Fabry wraparound cover is also available. *2000 AD* #2000 is due September 28th – as



good a jumping on point as any, for new readers. Get stuck in!

Not particularly massive news, nor a return to comics by a famous creator/character, but cool nonetheless: it's been reported that *The Raid* creator Gareth Evans is set to bring his punchy franchise to comics in a new series from Titan. Details remain scarce, but one should expect much punching and kicking, hopefully at some point this year. Insert *Dredd* sour grapes here.

Stuffed with exciting plans for the future and only a little sort-of backtracking, we wrap up another **View from the Watchtower**. With such big resurgences for July, heaven only knows what news we'll return to next month. Alan Moore back on *Halo Jones*?

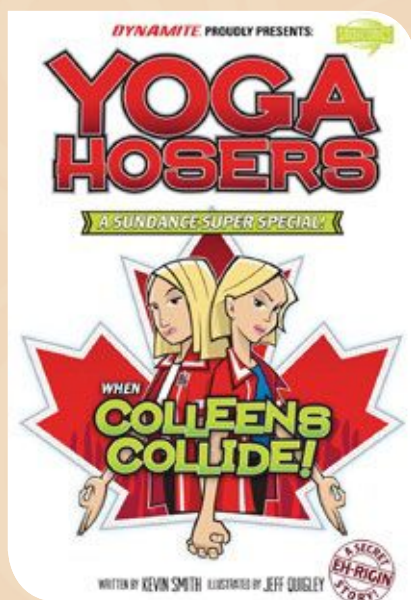
We can but dream. (Just ask Neil Gaiman, he knows how it ends anyway.)

Joel Harley can be contacted at: joel.harley@starburstmagazine.com and tweeted @joelharley



REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC
BOOK RELEASES
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YOGA HOSERS: WHEN COLLEENS COLLIDE

WRITER: KEVIN SMITH / ARTIST: JEFF QUIGLEY
/ PUBLISHER: DYNAMITE / RELEASE: OUT NOW

Kevin Smith, director of some good movies and writer of some good comic books, turns his hand in the opposite direction with Yoga Hosers, a comic book prequel to this year's movie of the same name. Itself a spin-off to the questionable Tusk, this book serves as a taster introduction to Colleen C and Colleen M, bit part players turned leading ladies – the stars of Yoga Hosers, eh.

It's a curious decision by Smith, creating a Tusk spin-off around the very worst things about Tusk, but here we are. Perhaps less curious, given that one of those worst things happens to be his own daughter, Harley Quinn Smith... thankfully, the ridiculous Guy LaPointe (the worst performance Johnny Depp ever gave!) is nowhere to be seen though, letting the ladies Colleen take centre stage. When Colleens Collide details their meeting and subsequent friendship, obliquely referencing the events of Tusk, but keeping this very much its own thing. Nothing too strenuous in the plot department, then, eh.

Eh, what? What's with the eh, you say? The Canadian gags which everyone found hilarious in Tusk also return, in a script littered with 'ehs', 'aboots' and Moose Farts. It's exactly the same vein of humour as practiced by Justin Long's asshole in Tusk – a crime for which Smith had him turned

into a walrus by the end of the film (not a spoiler, it's literally called Tusk). Bit of an about turn, then, Smith fully embracing the stereotypes for When Colleens Collide. Not to mention his thereby admitting the accuracy of Long's jibes – someone owes the walrus an apology, methinks.

Four pages of two girls being called Colleen and five pages of doing yoga later – plus a lot more filler – leaves one wondering quite what the point is. It's inconsequential fluff, and as a taster for Yoga Hosers the movie, downright off-putting. Either the man's ear for dialogue has been entirely lost, or it simply doesn't extend to writing teenage girls, for this is an atrociously written book. Jeff Quigley's art isn't much better, but when the writing is this bad it is, at least, not the worst thing about the book.

Shoddy fluff capitalising on the good name of a once-great writer and director, Yoga Hosers is a sad disappointment. When Colleens Collide serves not only as a bad omen for Yoga Hosers, but a stark warning too: Kevin Smith must be stopped. Bring on the Walrus.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★ 3



DEVIL'S LINE 1

WRITER & ARTIST: RYO HANADA / PUBLISHER:
VERTICAL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Devil's Line is a manga series by Ryo Hanada that takes place in a world of vampires and devils. This series has now been released in English, this first volume, which collects the first six 'lines' in the series. At over 200 pages in length, there is much to love about this series, but it needs to be original in order to distinguish itself from other manga series on UK shelves.

Manga has become increasingly popular in the UK, and whilst Devil's Line does have some stereotypical elements, it is largely a new and inventive tale of heartbreak and the supernatural. The story follows Tsukasa, a student who is rescued from an attack by a vampire. She is saved by Anzai, a half-devil. Anzai uses his supernatural gifts as a member of a secret police force that focuses specifically on vampire-related crime. As the story unfolds, the two forge a bond. However, Anzai has a strict rule of not drinking human blood, and this friendship will be the ultimate test of his ability to resist.

As far as manga goes, this is a pretty straightforward story. Rather than an adventure tale like many manga, this tale is highly character-driven, and is more focused on the development of

Tsukasa and Anzai's relationship. This first collection, in particular, concentrates on setting up the boundaries and the characters for the development of story arcs for the future of the series. However, with its black and white drawings and its simple narrative, it is a quick and thrilling read that will lead into a character-fuelled story. Whilst maybe not for all fans of manga, it could certainly be a success with teenagers who like the vampire romance, stories which are still proving increasingly popular.

ANDREW MUSK

★★★★★ 7





HEXES #1: THE BOY WHO CAME CLOSER

WRITER: SIMON BIRKS / ARTIST: EGE AVCI / PUBLISHER: BLUE FOX COMICS / RELEASE DATE: TBC

Hexes: Book 1 is an impressive release from writer Simon Birks (Sinners) and artist Ege Avci, telling the eerie tale of a dying young boy named Brendan whose life is saved after being gifted a magical stone by a mysterious stranger. In situations like this one, history has taught us there is always a catch and in this case, it's that the stone

won't work indefinitely, and sooner or later death will catch up to Brendan, whether he's ready for it or not. Fast-forward about fourteen years and, after moving back into his now-dilapidated childhood home, Brendan is haunted by a glowing figure and quickly realises his time is up.

This one-and-done story, told over just twenty-four pages, is shockingly effective; the tension ramps up with each and every page as we gradually learn more about Brendan's life up to this point. Indeed, a time-hopping narrative such as this one can sometimes be

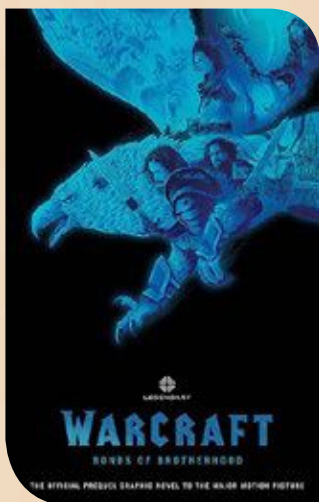
confusing but here, it's handled expertly, never bogging down the book's fast pace, only adding more depth to this memorable haunting tale. The book's two leads, Brendan and his close friend Tamsin, are compelling; their interactions come across as refreshingly realistic.

Birks finds new and intriguing ways to creep out his readers, which are brought stunningly to life by artist Ege Avci. Avci's illustrations are a crucial element in establishing this book's moody tone, with his distinctive character designs and macabre backgrounds proving to be somehow unnerving and beautiful simultaneously. Even the panels that feature no paranormal activity have an air of eeriness about them, and often it's hard to shake the feeling that something is watching in their darkest corners.

For such a short story, Hexes has an impressive feeling of unpredictability about it, keeping you guessing as to the final destination up to the very last page. This makes it all the more disappointing that the book falters somewhat in its ending, which feels quite abrupt and a little confusing. Putting salt in the wound is the knowledge that with issue two moving on to a brand new story, we're unlikely to get the answers that are absent in this finale. Nonetheless, Hexes is a very enjoyable read which horror fans should definitely have on their radar.

DAVID CRAIG

★★★★★ 8



WARCRAFT: BONDS OF BROTHERHOOD

WRITER: PAUL CORNELL, CHRIS METZEN / ARTIST: VARIOUS / PUBLISHER: LEGENDARY COMICS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Warcraft: Bonds of Brotherhood is the official prequel graphic novel to Duncan Jones' fantasy epic, Warcraft. Based on the video game of the same name, this is Blizzard Entertainment's attempt at further exploring Duncan Jones' vision.

Featuring art by six different contributors, Bonds of Brotherhood is

written by Paul Cornell (Doctor Who) based on a story by Chris Metzen (Transformers: Autocracy). The graphic novel follows three main characters from the film - Llane, Lothar, and Medivh - decades before the initial orc invasion.

These legends of the Alliance embark on a quest that involves deadly trolls who have been running rampant across villages in Azeroth. Their brief adventure results in a death that has heavy implications for the King and his people, with vengeance being the key theme of the story.

Unfortunately, Cornell's script is serviceable, at best. The backstory featured in Bonds of Brotherhood fits nicely for the film, but the exploration of these characters is marred by some lazy writing and exposition. Regardless of what transpires throughout the comic, there's no emotional weight or excitement whatsoever.

Towards the end of the book, Bonds of Brotherhood mentions that trolls were cut from the original film, so including them in the prequel comic sounded great on paper. However, they have just a smidgen of characterisation here, which is awful in comparison to Warcraft's depiction of its orcs.

Considering the book's short length of just over a hundred pages, it's bizarre that Blizzard happily opted for six different artists. A book so small shouldn't have that many unless it's a compilation of different stories. Despite having so many artists, the general style remains the same and major

characters are completely interchangeable in their design.

While these artists have at least attempted to capture the look and feel of the universe, Bonds of Brotherhood fails to deliver the same visual quality that the franchise is renowned for. It almost feels like a pure product of the '90s, with the line work and bland colouring. Medivh's magic looked immense in the film, but here it just looks dull and lifeless.

If fans of the film are looking for more backstory on Duncan Jones' film, then they'll be better suited with the prequel novel, Durotan. Bonds of Brotherhood feels more like a blatant cash grab if anything, which is clearly overpriced for its short length. There's just no genuine surprise or entertainment found here, which is unfortunate considering how Warcraft has been received by most of its fans.

MATT WELLS

★★★★★ 2



The Ripple Effect

written by Sam Gardner Jr
art by Jake Rowlinson





ANIME-NATION

A MONTHLY
ROUND UP FROM
THE WORLD OF ANIME
AND MANGA FROM
LITTLEANIMEBLOG.COM'S
DOMINIC CUTHBERT



ERASED Spin-Off Manga Shifts Focus to Kayo Hinazuki

When the **ERASED** manga ended in Kadokawa's Young Ace magazine back in March, a spin-off penned by its original author Kei Sanbe was lined up for June. **Boku dake ga Inai Machi: Re** has since revealed in its first chapter that the story takes place while the main character, unwitting time traveller Satoru, is still in his 15-year coma. The focus instead shifts to Kayo Hinazuki, who is now a junior high school student after her disappearance was averted by Satoru and his friends.

PR Campaign to Bolster Popularity of Underdog Pokémon

It's no understatement to say that Simisear has an image problem. Coming dead last in the 'Pokémon General Election 720' (with Pikachu coming in fourth!) could shatter the steeliest of egos and, despite adversity, a new promotional campaign is aiming to bolster the poor Fire Type's low esteem. Call us cynical, but it might take more than bribing fans with 'presents' to raise the popularity of Simisear (known as 'Baokkie' in its native Japan). Nevertheless, the campaign kicked off on June 25th, lasting until July 15th at Pokémon Centres across Japan.

Japanese Government Begins Human Eye Inspections of Illegally Uploaded Anime and Films

The Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is putting new measures in place to combat the illegal uploading of anime and films to the Internet. Up until now, the Ministry used computers to detect pirated videos automatically, but to crack down on the recent spike in videos slipping through, they're beginning to employ humans to enforce a double-checking process. For now a single expert, knowledgeable on anime, films and ways to find illegal videos online, will be browsing video streaming sites, and checking for any copyright violations through the painstaking process of watching videos one by one. This time it's serious!

Miyazaki Plans Three More Ghibli Museum Shorts

In a recent interview, Studio Ghibli producer Yoshiaki Nishimura revealed that Hayao Miyazaki is planning three more shorts for the Ghibli Museum. Miyazaki, who has now retired from directing features, wants to bring the total number of Ghibli Museum Shorts from the current nine up to twelve, so they can be rotated once a month. But as yet, there is no confirmation that he will direct them himself.

SPACE DANDY and TOKYO GHOUL Table Top Games Announced

Game publishers Ninja Division has joined forces with Seven Seas Entertainment to form Shinobi 7, which will produce table top games based on hit anime, manga, and pop culture brands and franchises. Their first outing is slated for the fourth quarter of 2016, with the launch of **Space Dandy Galactic Deck-Building Game**. As yet, there has been no word on releases outside the US, but as Ninja Division publish games worldwide, it seems hopeful that there will be international releases in future.

Anime Eyes Becoming Too Complex For Professional Artists to Cope With

Ask any anime or manga fan which one feature marks the art style out and they'd almost certainly settle on the big eyes that date back to Osamu Tezuka's **Astro Boy**. But these eyes are becoming so intricate that artists are struggling to earn a living. Kazuyoshi Yaginuma, a veteran key animator, recently took to Twitter to bemoan the fact that there's as much effort involved in drawing the eyes of a modern anime gal as there was in drawing the entire bridge of the Space Battleship Yamato back in the '80s. He added that drawing just three frames with modern anime eyes takes two hours, while the average pay per single frame is 200 yen (just over £1 in GBP).

TOKYO GHOUL Author's Joke HUNTER X HUNTER Prequel Released as Real One-Shot Manga

Flashback to April 1st, 2015 and **Tokyo Ghoul** scribe Sui Ishida was joshing around with a **Hunter x Hunter** prequel involving the bungee gum bandit Hisoka. Back in the present day, **HxH**'s 33rd manga volume arrived as expected after Togashi's three-year hiatus, and Ishida's **Tokyo Ghoul:re Volume 7** followed suit. In celebration, a crossover interview with both authors was published online, as well as Ishida's very real 69-page prequel, young Hisoka and all.



A MONTHLY
FOCUS ON
THE COSTUMED
ROLE-PLAY SCENE AT
FAN CONVENTIONS
AROUND THE WORLD

COSPLAY CATWALK



GORDON FERGUSON - This month, we talk to another rising star in the cosplay scene whose CHAPPIE creation recently won the cosplay competition at Edinburgh Comic Con.

STARBURST: The contest placed a lot of emphasis on costumes that were homemade by the entrants. Do you feel it makes a costume more special when you create it yourself?

Gordon Fergusson: It's definitely more rewarding, especially if you can get it as close to the source material as possible. When you see people's positive reactions and think 'I've done this; I've made this,' it feels incredibly fulfilling.

Why did you decide on CHAPPIE?

I really like the character and being a very slight build I thought I could keep the costume faithful to the way he looks on screen. With a lot of robotics costumes, if you change anything it can alter the look or the way that parts move, but since CHAPPIE is more or less a robot human – essentially a cyborg – it was quite easy to adapt. The only adjustments I had to make were due to the height difference, and there were some parts I had to leave out, but the majority of it is completely faithful to the original.

How you go about designing and constructing the costume?

Most of it was designed entirely from scratch because it hadn't really been done before. I was quite lucky in finding a lot of photos of the actual props from the film and used them to get things to scale by measuring out every single line on the suit. I then made paper templates and figured out how it would fit together and just worked backwards from there. For every piece you see on Chappie, there's a bit of paper the same size in my folder of construction.

How long did it take to make?

Because I work full time, it's only in the evenings that I have time to create, so from start to finish, from the moment I decided I wanted to make CHAPPIE to the finished product, was almost a year, with about six months of that for construction. It was the challenge that kept me interested, and after investing so much time, I had to see it through.

Is this the most complex costume you've made?

Given the work involved and because



there were no plans already available, it was definitely the trickiest one I've done because I was pretty much making it up as I went along. I was trying to remain as faithful as possible, so that meant I had to delve deeper into the details, which in turn meant a lot more work in the long run.

There were weeks on end where I spent hours on the build every day and at the end of it, all I had were the forearms and the elbows. A lot of this was to do with the measurements and the sizing; often if you have the scale wrong on one part, then when you do the next part it doesn't fit together or it could affect the movement or the way it looks or it could just skew the whole piece.

There are still some things I'd like to change, but it's as finished as it can be. With anything you put a lot of time into creating, you always find one thing that you need to alter, but I'm happy with it in its current state.

Was the costume a solo creation or a team effort?

When I was measuring the placement for the straps that hold the chest piece in place, I had a little help from my brother, who held things in position and gave his opinion on how it looked, but the actual construction and planning was entirely me, just getting my head down and working it out.

What other costumes have you made?

I've done quite a few costumes, but the only other one where I really put in the time and effort and would consider a proper cosplay was a **Ghostbusters** one where I made a screen-accurate proton pack with all the lights and





sounds. I've also done characters like Admiral Ackbar, Bender from **Futurama**, and WALL-E, all of which I made from scratch. But the ones I'm most proud of are **Ghostbusters** and CHAPPIE.

Do you have anything else planned?

Subject One from **Flashpoint: Project Superman** will be a nice easy one to pull off until I've got something more elaborate planned. Play to my strengths, use my wiry body. I've got nothing else specific in mind at the moment, but I'll know when I see it.

I've not done a lot of work with PVA foam, which tends to be heavily involved in many of the bigger and more complex costumes, so I'd like to get my skill level up with it and move on from there. I'm still learning, and that's one of the best parts about cosplay. Although I've been quite lucky with the response I've had for the things I've made, I don't think you ever reach a point where you've done it all and you know everything. You're constantly learning, constantly adapting. With the experience I now have, there are some things I'd like to remake and would do in a different way.

Since so many people are getting involved with cosplay and it seems to be more inclusive than it's ever been, I really think it's one of the best times to be a part of it. The bar is set higher every time there's a contest, and you can not only appreciate the work that's been done but also see what's possible. And it makes you think 'What will I do next?'

You can check out Gordon's creations at [facebook.com/distractcosplay](https://www.facebook.com/distractcosplay)

Andrew Marshall

READER'S COSPLAY "GEORGIA HAINES"



Another passionate cosplayer tells us about her hobby....

STARBURST: How long have you been Cosplaying?

Georgia Haines: Well, I used to do a lot of character costumes for Halloween, such as Freddy Krueger, Billy the Puppet (**Saw**), and Anakin Skywalker; I then did my first convention cosplay at the **Doctor Who** Experience in 2013 when I went as Matt Smith's Doctor.

But I'd say that cosplaying didn't become a permanent and adult passion of mine until March 2015, when I went to my first comic con as Arnold Rimmer. It's now such an important part of my life, not only are comic cons and conventions

such amazing places, but I get to just completely nerd out and meet so many amazing people. I've never had a bad experience with comic con or cosplay. It helps my confidence, has created friendships, and has given me so many incredible memories. I really cannot imagine my life without it.

Who is your favourite character to dress as?

I don't have many cosplays in my arsenal yet (something I hope to change soon), but my favourite so far is Columbia from **The Rocky Horror Picture Show**. She's my favourite character and it's a lot of fun to wear all of the sparkling clothing and intense drag make-up.

I have also received so many heart-warmingly nice compliments when wearing it - which is so humbling. I just have great fun being Columbia... unless it's cold! Even Nell Campbell herself likes it!

How long do you normally spending making the costumes?

As long as I need to; if I can, I set myself a goal - which is the next convention I plan to attend, but I'll usually only start making a costume or prop if I feel I have enough time. If not, I'll wait until after the event and start then. But I like to take my time with what I make, I hate rushing a cosplay and it ends up looking badly made.

Find out more about Georgia at [facebook.com/GeorgiaHainesCosplay](https://www.facebook.com/GeorgiaHainesCosplay) and [YoukaiCosplay on Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/YoukaiCosplay).

Martin Unsworth



Are you a cosplayer and want to see your work featured in STARBURST? Drop us an email at cosplay@starburstmagazine.com and we'll print our favourites every month

STARBURST

COSPLAY

PIXEL JUICE

NEWS AND PREVIEWS
IN GAMING
BY LEE PRICE



INSPIRING
NEW WORLDS
JUNE 14-16, 2016 | LOS ANGELES

E3 ROUND UP

So E3 2016 has come and gone and, as usual, there are a number of juicy titbits, so let's get stuck in!

E3 - MICROSOFT

The big news, hardware-wise, from the Microsoft conference was the unveiling of the Xbox One S, continuing the grand tradition of redesigning perfectly good hardware that has been going on since the 1980s. The console will not have Kinect compatibility, so it should hopefully be cheaper because of it.

In gaming news, *Gears of War 4* looks faster and more terrifying than the series has ever looked before, while *Dead Rising 4* is looking increasingly hilarious. We got to see a bit more of *ReCore*, which is coming out very soon, plus there was a showing of an epic boss fight from the upcoming *Final Fantasy 15*.

Platinum Games are back with *Scalebound*, which will apparently feature a boss fight that outstrips anything the company has produced before, which will be pretty impressive for anybody who knows Platinum's track record. Other interesting games include *Inside* and *We Happy Few*, so Microsoft definitely put on a stronger showing than last year.

...Oh and before we forget, there's also Project Scorpio, which is a sorta-new console that will allow Microsoft to experiment with VR gameplay of their own. We know the console is going to be mega-powerful and that the company aims to make sure that Xbox One and S owners don't get alienated. Microsoft has now played their hand in the VR game, which means the console war is going to get fought on two fronts now.

COMING SOON



**METROID PRIME:
FEDERATION FORCE**
PLATFORM: 3DS

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 2ND

Federation Force is set to play very similarly to Metroid Prime Hunters, in that it is focused much more on the shooting element of the games than it is on the exploration. It will also be the first to give players the chance to control the Marines of the Galactic Federation, rather than Samus herself. The game has generated an awful lot of controversy from fans who think the Metroid name is just being used to ship a product unrelated to the series, especially as Samus won't be playable, so it will be interesting to see how it turns out.

E3 - SONY

The announcement of *Resident Evil 7* for the PS4 was probably the biggest score for Sony at E3, with the game's demo having already set the internet alight. The game seems like it may be more reminiscent of what *Silent Hills* was meant to be, rather than the traditional *Resi* we all know and have gotten slightly bored of. Better yet, VR compatibility will also be added, which likely means many a brick shall be shat come January, if the demo is any indication.

Last Guardian was given a release date of October 25th - which just so happens to be this writer's birthday, so if anybody is looking for a gift idea... - and a new *God of War* that appears to show Kratos playing dad was unveiled. *Days Gone*, which is a zombie shooter that appears to be as close as we've gotten to *World War Z* as a videogame, was also announced, while Sony provided a bit more info on PlayStation VR.

Of course, we can't leave out Hideo Kojima, who announced his new game, *Death Stranding*, as a PS4 exclusive. We got to see naked Norman Reedus with an umbilical cord and can only anticipate the craziness that Kojima has in store.

COMING SOON



LUCIUS

PLATFORM: WII U, PS4

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 2ND

Released on the PC way back in 2012, Lucius is a psychological stealth horror game that is centred around a six-year-old boy named Lucius, who just so happens to be the son of Lucifer himself. Interestingly, players take control of the boy himself as he uses his various powers to murder everybody in a house. The aim of the game is to get the killings done while leaving as little evidence behind as possible. So, in essence, it is almost like The Omen crossed with the Hitman games, which should be more than enough to get most people excited.

E3 - NINTENDO

No news about the NX, no confirmation either way about the company's stance on VR and not a whole lot going on in general.

We did get to see more of **Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild**, though, and we now know it is coming to the NX, which was a given really with the state of the Wii U. Other than that, there were some updates about **Pokémon Sun and Moon**, but Nintendo are likely saving the big guns for their own conferences.

E3 - OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

Of course, plenty of gaming's biggest publishers and developers had a lot to show off as well.

Bethesda announced that **Fallout 4** will be coming to VR and that they will be releasing **Skyrim** for the current generation of consoles. **Dishonoured 2** is also happening, as is **Prey 2**, which came as a pleasant shock. The company also announced **Quake: Champions** as a PC exclusive.

EA gave us more details about **Mass Effect: Andromeda**, while also making the announcement that more **Star Wars** games are coming, including a **Battlefront 2**. We also got to see **TitanFall 2** in action.

Ubisoft were not to be outdone though, announcing the release of a new **South Park** game in addition to **Watch Dogs 2**, which we hope will live up to the promise that the first game demonstrated. **Star Trek: Bridge Crew** looks very interesting, being a real-life sim set in the **Star Trek** universe.

We also got to find out more about **Persona 5**, Telltale's upcoming **Batman** game, and just how **Serious Sam** is going to work in VR.

COMING SOON



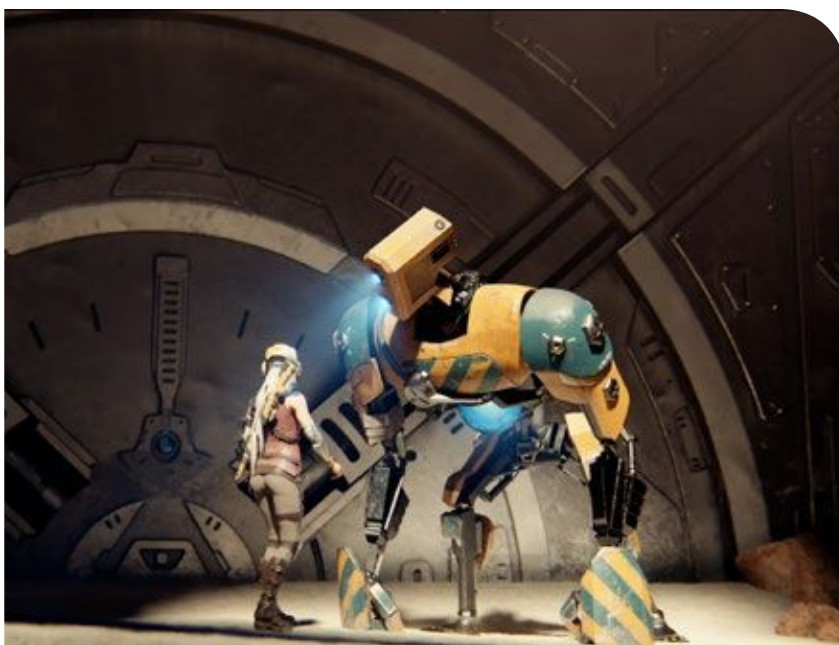
BIOSHOCK: THE COLLECTION

PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 16TH

It seems that barely a month goes by that we don't get a remastered version of a game that we only played a few years ago and this month it's BioShock's turn to jump on the bandwagon. The collection will include BioShock 1, 2, and Infinite, making it ideal for those who missed out the first time around. Updated graphics and some of the DLC from the games will also be included, so it shouldn't be missed if you want to have the most complete BioShock collection around.

COMING SOON



RECORE

PLATFORM: PC, XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 16TH

ReCore is an action-adventure game that seems to have a fairly interesting premise. The player character has the ability to pull out cores from the robots that she fights, leading to them collapsing. There are also hints that these cores may be usable to activate other robots, should the trailer prove to be accurate. There's not a whole lot getting revealed about the title, but it looks somewhat post-apocalyptic and features a robot dog companion, so there are going to be obvious comparisons to Fallout and the like. It may be worth checking out, though.

E3 - THE WINNERS AND LOSERS

All in all, it was a much more even E3 this time around, though you could still argue that Sony just about edged it with the massive game announcements. However, Microsoft put up a much better fight this time around and likely won out in terms of hardware.

Which brings us onto Nintendo, as it continues to essentially disregard E3 in favour of its own events. The company claims it doesn't want to show off the NX yet, as they are wary of other people imitating the concepts. However, the console comes out early next year and it would be really nice to have some idea of what we will be getting. E3 would have been a great place to do this, but Nintendo obviously think differently.

MIGHTY NO.9 Experiences More Launch Delays

Mighty No.9 finally launched this month, though said launch has been punctuated by a number of issues that those who have been supporting the campaign to get the game released for a long time are likely to be a bit annoyed about.

A lot of gamers experienced issues redeeming the game on PSN, while the Xbox 360, Mac, and Linux Steam releases had issues with bugs that caused delays. There was also some controversy surrounding apparent comments made by Keiji Inafune that suggested that the game launching with a few problems is still better than nothing. Hopefully, by the time you read this all of the issues should be sorted (see our review on page 116).

RESIDENT EVIL 7: BEGINNING HOUR Excites

In the wake of Sony's announcement that **Resident Evil 7** would be coming to PS4, Capcom released a playable demo in much the same vein as **P.T.**, which has been made available to PSN subscribers.

The demo has caused a lot of excitement in the gaming community, particularly because at the time of writing, nobody has been able to complete it properly. Your objective is to escape the house you start in, but the only two endings that have been discovered so far end in death. There are also a lot of items (including a mannequin finger and an axe) that appear to be important but don't have any sort of functionality that anybody has been able to discover yet.

Capcom are keeping tight-lipped about whether the demo is even possible to complete properly, instead seemingly relishing in the opportunity to bask in the fact that **Resident Evil 7** now has more buzz behind it than the series has seen since the run-up to the launch of the fourth title.



New SONIC Game Announced

News of a new **Sonic** game isn't quite as earth-shattering as it was back in SEGA's prime, but there is still plenty to get excited about with the upcoming title, which was given a 2017 release date at a recent event commemorating 25 years of SEGA's most popular creation.

There is very little news about the game, apart from the fact that it is in development, but many are hoping that the title will take **Sonic** back to his roots in much the same way as **Generations** and **Sonic 4** attempted. Here's hoping that Sonic Team can finally craft a game that is as universally adored as the Sonic games from the Mega Drive era.

Ubisoft Casablanca Closes Down

With all of the positive gaming news that has come from E3 2016, it is easy to overlook that not everything has been rosy. This is especially the case for Ubisoft, which announced the closure of its Casablanca studio during the month. The studio was responsible for porting Ubisoft games to handhelds and had been open for 18 years.

Some of the 48 staff members will be transferred to other Ubisoft studios, while the rest will unfortunately have to be let go by the company.

COMING SOON



DRAGON QUEST VII: FRAGMENTS OF THE FORGOTTEN PAST

PLATFORM: 3DS

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 16TH

It is rather remarkable to see just how popular the Dragon Quest games have become, especially considering that it wasn't until the eighth in the series was released that they started to gain any traction in the UK. This is a remake of Dragon Quest VII, which was released way back in 2001, so expect all of the mandatory graphical bells and whistles, in addition to a switch over to visible enemies, rather than random encounters. That should make it ideal for those who want to play some of the older games in the series.

COMING SOON



XCOM 2

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 9TH

PC gamers will already be well aware of what they will be getting should they buy XCOM 2 on a console. Turn-based gameplay that relies heavily on smart player tactics is the order of the day here and there is an enormous amount of content available to eat into your time. Maps are generated procedurally and their state often reflects what is happening in the game's world at the time. If you are looking for a real time-sink game to keep you going for the next few months, there can really be few better choices.

ALLISON ROAD Gets Cancelled

Allison Road was meant to be the game that would rise out of the ashes of **Silent Hills** like a phoenix, offering gamers the chance to play something that was inspired by what we had hoped Konami's cancelled project would have been.

Unfortunately, all of the excitement surrounding the project has been dulled by the announcement that it too has been cancelled. Starting life as a Kickstarter project, the game was eventually picked up by Team 17. However, it now looks like we won't be getting it, following a Twitter announcement being made about the game getting canned.

We can only hope that **Resident Evil 7** fills the horror void as well as its trailer demo suggests that it will.

THE LATEST
GAMING RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER

DEVELOPER: CREATIVE ASSEMBLY / PUBLISHER: SEGA / PLATFORM: PC, MAC, LINEX /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's quite rare to find something so perfect but so completely off the wall as Total War: Warhammer. While the engine was certainly well suited to the vast armies and combat both franchises were renowned for, Creative Assembly has always prided itself upon historical accuracy. The question always remained if they could effectively implement daemons, dragons, and wizards as they had Romans, Carthaginians, and Napoleonic France. Thankfully though, the end result has proven to be nothing short of spectacular.

Creative Assembly approached this setting with understandable caution. Rather than attempting to reinvent the wheel, many familiar mechanics remain core to the game, from the detailed economy to directing armies across the world map. The RTS element remains as complex as ever, with the expected mix of hard and soft counters, ranging from cavalry to artillery to heavy infantry. However, the developer worked around this to implement unique changes when needed, reflecting each faction's way of war. While the Empire retains a more traditional economy and balances black powder weapons with schools of wizardry, the Orcs' WAAAGH! encourages them to constantly advance into battle for added bonuses. Equally, the Vampire Counts rely upon corpses for their own recruitment grounds, and the ultra-defensive Dwarf Book of Grudges can throw people a few curve balls even in a game's last moments.

The variety of units here is simply staggering, as many have adapted entire ranges of miniatures wholesale to flesh out each side's massive legions. Little to nothing among existing factions has been left for future DLC, and whether it's massed ranged bombardments, heavy magical broadsides or a massed charge of knights atop chicken-horse hybrids, Total War: Warhammer has you covered. Better yet, it's remarkably well balanced for such a diverse number of units, and nothing runs the risk of truly overwhelming armies on their lonesome. Vampire bats might be able to send Empire grunts running but Orcs will laugh off their effects, and every unit has some counter somewhere in the game.

Having clearly listened to the criticism of Rome II, the map this time is much more manageable. While still vast, it's not so easy to get lost in as with that game and manages not to be quite so massive it drags out the entire game. In addition to this, the environments are far more varied with underground fortresses, catacombs, Chaos corrupted lands, and the mountainous homes of the dwarves all putting in an appearance. These can have some very interesting environmental effects as time goes by and many factions can alter their very state to suit their own needs, a necessity when playing Vampire Counts and Chaos.

The actual RTS side of things is as solid as ever, but unfortunately, the AI does retain

a few of its usual demented strategies. Despite being far smarter than those found in Rome II or its predecessors, players have already found a number of ways to exploit gaps in its logic or easily beat them via a few unusual army formations or unconventional flanking attacks. What's more, while the game is well rounded on the battlefield, outside of it there are a few frustrating issues here and there. Due to its late implementation as a playable faction, Chaos' economy seems to be extremely problematic, and turns the game into a massive uphill battle for those favouring them. As they cannot build facilities, you can only gain cash or more units by attacking and pillaging towns, making players extremely reliant upon raiding certain areas and vulnerable to a quick defeat.

Finally, certain faction elements relating to the lore are dubious, both when sticking to it and moving away from it. Many longtime dwarf fans were left grinding their teeth at the prospect of allying with the undead (a big lore no-no if ever there was one) and there are similar oddities among the other factions. On the other side of that coin, though, it was decided factions would be unable to conquer the entire map because of established lore, limiting player advancement.

Overall though, these issues – save for Chaos – are teething problems at most. This is easily one of the best Total War releases in years and one of the best of the entire series. Creative Assembly has hit the ball out of the park with this one, and any longtime fan of the series should be ready to feel that same addictive itch all over again. Grab this one at the earliest opportunity.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 8





Z WAR ONE: DAMNATION

PUBLISHER: DICE SPORTS / DESIGNER: ROBERT BUTLER / ARTIST: BEN MILNES / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The current big thing in table top gaming is big box games. One box filled to the brim with goodies that does it all. This is mostly possible due to things like crowd-funding, and has allowed some interesting games jammed with big ideas to make it onto the market. Strategy miniature game Z War One – Damnation is one such thing.

Zombie games are nothing new, of course. The walking dead are one of the typical 'spices' you can find in a lot of gaming. This is partially because zombies are visually striking and very interesting, and also because if your game is about beating things up then shambling corpses make great villains. Given the success of games like Zombicide, you may

be wondering what new things Z War One brings to the table.

The simple answer is detail. From the lovingly sculpted models, to the thick and chunky board game components, Z War One feels like an artisan take on the genre. This extends to the rules and the setting. The rules are involved and pretty detailed; this is a game in which you'll be tracking ammo. You have to pick your heroes carefully for each scenario and we are encouraged to become invested in the heroes. The game provides extensive back-story, including a very detailed comic book. The comic strip elements are lovely, though we sort of wish they were in a separate book. The art does make the simple rulebook look chunky. The extensive storytelling also makes it tricky to navigate the book, but the atmosphere of this game is one of its selling points, so you can't have it all.

The vibe of the game is the thing that makes this really work. This is not a high-speed roll and forget game, it's a more considered horror adventure. The game has two modes; the basic mode is all the players

against a set scenario. The party has to work together to achieve some sort of target without getting horribly murdered by the walking dead. The second mode is more interesting. In Director mode, one player controls the zombies. They have a set of action cards that allow them to change and influence the movement and generation of the dead. The Director can also cause calamity to befall the players. Desperately scrabbling around for that infection cure? The Director has a card that will make it harder, and so on.

This basically turns the game into Hero Quest versus The Walking Dead, and this approach is the one that we've found the most rewarding. Even if your games shelf is currently filled with miniatures-based games and groaning with zombies, we think Z War One – Damnation is worth your time for the gorgeous pieces alone. Well worth a look and great fun to play.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★ 9



MIGHTY NO. 9

DEVELOPER: COMCEPT, INTI CREATES / PUBLISHER: DEEP SILVER / PLATFORM: PC, PS3, PS4, XBOX ONE, WII U, SHIELD PORTABLE, PS VITA, MAC, LINUX / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

For years, critics and analysts have been predicting the crowd-funding bubble finally bursting thanks to one high-profile failure too many. Thanks to the likes of Mighty No. 9, it's not hard to see why. This should have been a simple task to accomplish – develop a successor to the Mega Man series bereft of Capcom's interference, stick to what worked a dozen times before, and make the fans happy. What we ended up with were lengthy delays, drama and a cheap

platformer any competent indie dev could have squirted out in a few months.

The plot is about as Mega Man as it comes without starring the blue bomber himself. You play as the creation of a kindly scientist, you need to stop several fellow creations gone wrong, and you steal their powers. This would be acceptable were it not for the stilted voice acting and botched translation, marring even the simple story of the game.

The core design is sadly

little better, as it proves to be tough but unrewarding. At every stage, you run a hellish gauntlet of foes, often with arbitrarily random death traps thrown in. While in a good platformer, a player would be allowed to learn from the experience, here it's a case of sheer luck overcoming certain obstacles and hoping certain puzzles don't arbitrarily screw you over. Walls of bullets emerging or areas you can only pass through by taking damage all show up, and the game is happy to rob you of over half your health in certain moments should you screw something up.

Worst among the game's failings are the bosses. These should have been the highlight of each level, but instead, they exemplify its worst failings. The slightest error can see you losing a life in an instant, and they often repeat the same gimmicks time and time again. There's no restraint here, no opportunity to truly learn and progress, and every so often a death will force you to repeat the entire prior level.

Mighty No. 9 is mediocre at its best, and it's made all the worse by brief shining moments where you can see its potential through

inventive platforming sections, memorable foes, and challenging level designs. The problem is, the moment you start to enjoy yourself, you hit yet another brick wall.

No one will deny the gaming industry has seen far worse done with so much more over past years, but this one hit harder than any of those. It offered a ray of hope for jaded and bitter fans of a decaying franchise, only to torment them as their shining new series emerges dead on arrival.

Welcome to the Duke Nukem Forever of crowd-funded games.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★★★ 4





HEARTS OF IRON IV

DEVELOPER AND PUBLISHER: PARADOX / PLATFORM: PC, MAC, LINUX / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Some games are like films, cinematic and all visual action. Other games are like an orchestra – complex and multifaceted, arranged meticulously, hundreds of individual elements working together in layered harmony. Hearts of Iron IV is the latter style of video game, and it is composed in the most compelling way. Paradox Interactive proves itself an excellent conductor, drawing together separate parts with practised ease.

Here is a disclaimer ahead of

abundant praise: Hearts of Iron IV has a steep learning curve that will only reward a patient desire to master it. It is in no way a casual game. Those who stick with it, however, will find themselves gifted with layer upon layer of tactical depth and tremendous replayability. The included tutorial is rudimentary at best, but by the time of writing, there is a lot of help out there from Paradox and the fan base.

HOI 4 lets you choose from a globe full of countries to rewrite the Second World War

at your will. You aren't in charge of a military force, but a nation, right down to national ideals and output of your factories. You must trade, form alliances, engage in diplomacy, research and produce weapons, train troops and plan your strategy while the world inches through a new, dynamic World War Two.

Playing our campaign from 1936 as the English, the scope of the game quickly became apparent. Building a trained army is one thing, getting it to battle is another. The logistics of destroying your enemies and thinking ahead on a global scale can be likened to chess with hundreds of men instead of just sixteen. You have to consider months of preparation, assign a commanding officer, then transport your military units, be they by land, air or boat. Add to this changing weather and the enormity of options available to the AI and you have to start thinking properly in advance. Time can be hastened or slowed down when you like it, and thank God for a handy 'spacebar' pause.

Thankfully, the abundance of information at your fingertips is brought to your eyes by an intuitive, straightforward interface. As a grand strategy

game, pretty graphics are not the essence here, but they are perfectly functional and effective. Everything is conveyed on the macro level, so you can't watch your new light tank division chew up the enemy. In fact, the sheer abundance of information makes it impossible to determine exactly what units are getting up to. This is the only disconnect we sometimes felt, but realise that it is more than likely the byproduct of playing other strategy games that simply don't have the same scope. Performance wise, HOI 4 starts to get a little laggy in the late game, due to the AI formulating so much stuff. It is noticeable but not game-breaking on a medium-spec PC.

Hearts of Iron IV is a step up from its predecessor in every way. Paradox claim that they wanted to streamline things in this iteration. What they have struck is a great balance of fluidity and depth. If you want a fully fledged World War Two simulator on the global level, you have the best possible example. Yes, it presents a challenging amount to learn, but it rewards you generously in kind.

BEN K

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



BATTLEFLEET GOTHIC: ARMADA – SPACE MARINES DLC

DEVELOPER: TINDALOS INTERACTIVE / PUBLISHER: FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE / PLATFORM: PC / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Every franchise has its icons to cement its image. Just as an oversized scarf and police box brings to mind Time Lords, and a glowing green sword of light is emblematic of Star Wars, oversized pauldrons and yells of "Emprahl!" instantly evoke Warhammer 40,000. As such, it was only a matter of time before the Adeptus Astartes – or Space Marines if you don't want

to bother with the faux Latin – rolled onto Battlefleet Gothic.

Despite having previously appeared as a small unplayable faction, the fleets here give a full impression of their capabilities. Alongside Strike Cruisers and the Gladius-class frigates, they now retain a wide array of escorts and several variants of each major vessel. These tend to fit into three

distinct categories, offering a ship with lance capabilities to shred armour, the ever-famous bombardment cannon or a small torpedo launcher array. However, what makes each ship stand out is that most come equipped with a launch bay, allowing for players to field a fleet of light carriers, hitting targets at long range before closing in for the kill.

On a mechanical level, the Space Marine fleets are an odd blend of Ork and Imperial elements. With strong armour, a relatively slow speed and powerful boarding actions, they fit right in with brawlers, yet they retain the ranged capabilities and speed boosts of the Imperium. While they lack the innate strengths of either faction, they can more easily enter and escape close range engagements and avoid being hemmed in by faster vessels. Given the criticisms surrounding the Orks facing down the likes of the Eldar, this offers a heavy hitting balance many fans have been desperately wanting.

Many of the upgrades are what you would expect, offering

unique personages to the fleet from the chapter's upper tiers. Some offer greater discipline, others a major bonus when relating to all things of the Warp, and so on and so forth. Sadly, despite the interesting units within the fleet, there's a distinct lack of personality when it comes to the chapters themselves. The Ultramarines, Space Wolves, Blood Angels, Dark Angels and Imperial Fists are all present, but little is done to reflect their own innate tactics and culture. What's more, there's a distinct lack of variety between certain classes, with many being limited simply to slight variations of the same vessel.

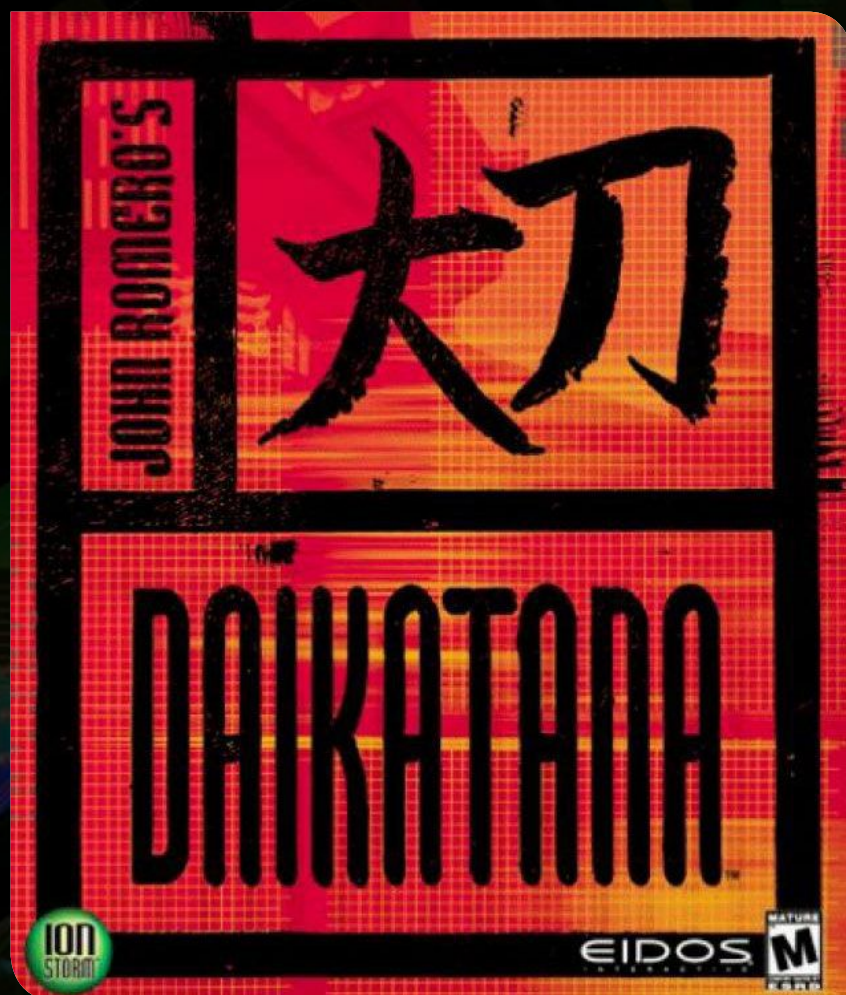
Overall, the Space Marine DLC is good but not spectacular. The lack of variety and personality definitely hurts it, but there's no denying the innate fun of the fleet tactics and new strategies. If you're looking for a little more fun from Battlefleet Gothic, this DLC will keep you entertained for hours on end.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 7

RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT
THE WORLD OF
RETRO GAMING
BY CHRIS JACKSON



IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

DAIKATANA (PC, N64, GBC, 2000)

Created by John Romero, one of the lead designers behind such classics as *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Quake*, and *Doom*, the original PC/N64 version of *Daikatana* was heavily hyped prior to its release in early 2000. A massive futuristic first-person shooter featuring a story set around two rival Japanese clans feuding over the most powerful sword ever created, designed by someone with such an impressive resume and based on the popular *Quake* engine, we were told (and many believed) that this was going to be the biggest and boldest first-person shooter experience so far. However, there were problems...

Daikatana was first declared ready for release in 1997, but ended up being delayed after a disastrous showing at that year's E3 event, which featured an extremely underwhelming demo that made the game look like something that had crawled out of the dark ages rather than the fresh and exciting product that Romero himself had been promising. It didn't help that *Daikatana* has already spent so long in development at this point that other games exhibited at E3 that year were using much more up to date technology rather than the now-outdated *Quake* engine, making *Daikatana* seem positively ancient in comparison.

The next couple of years could

politely be described as a 'troubled' period for the game, which saw entire months' worth of work being scrapped due to licensing issues, personal tensions among the staff at development company Ion Storm leading to people being fired left right and centre, and even more missed deadlines than us here at **Retro Bytes**. After re-coding the entire game to run on what was then seen as a more modern engine belonging to *Quake II* (it had initially been suggested that this could be done in just a few weeks, but it ended up taking almost an entire year), a return to E3 in 1999 did nothing to turn the crowds in its favour, as the only available demo was a positively sluggish multiplayer offering that wheezed along at a snail's pace and arguably made the game look even worse than people had previously thought.

The bad news didn't end when *Daikatana* was finally released in mid-2000. An almost offensively aggressive ad campaign simply stated 'John Romero's about to make you his bitch', without telling us anything about how, why, when, or where this unwanted (and, indeed, unwarranted) attempt on our person was going to be made. Also, unless you were an avid reader of gaming magazines, you'd be left wondering who on earth this John Romero character was (FYI: in his pre-*Daikatana* days, Romero had been a founding member of id Software and was responsible for some of the most ground-breaking games of the early '90s, including the aforementioned *Doom*, *Quake*, and *Wolfenstein 3D*). Someone in the marketing department probably thought they were being edgy and cool, but the advert only served to alienate a large portion of the game-buying public before they'd even got their hands on the game itself. And the less said about the advert's tagline, which advised us to simply 'suck it down', the better.

Further disappointment was in store for people who actually went out and bought a copy of *Daikatana*. The attempts to modernise the game by re-coding it to run on a more up-to-date engine had taken place in the late '90s, but it took a couple more years for the game to be deemed fit for human consumption. During that time, technology had moved on in leaps and bounds and Ion Storm found themselves trying to convince people to buy a brand new game that had already looked clunky and outdated before it had even been released.

As you might expect by now, that

wasn't the end of the problems. The game was also criticised for its brainless enemies who would usually just rush in a straight line towards the player, leading to a complete lack of strategy or suspense, and its moronic sidekicks who would often ignore commands from the player and even find themselves getting killed by random parts of the background scenery. These companions were absolutely integral to the game, as failing to keep them alive would result in having to restart the level. Being sent back to the beginning as a result of something that isn't even your own fault would be frustrating enough at the best of times, never mind being punished for something that wasn't even your fault and having to restart a level in a game as bad as this one...

The N64 edition of *Daikatana* was even more rushed than the PC version, resulting in truly awful graphics that made it almost impossible to work out what was happening on screen. In order to finally meet its scheduled release date, six entire levels were cut out and the companion characters were dropped from the game, although confusingly they still appear in cutscenes. It turned out that the removal of these sidekicks was seen as a positive, because at least it had done away with one of the glaring faults that PC owners had suffered with.

There was, however, a strange and unexpected twist lying in wait. In an age where handheld versions of console games were often seen as inferior to their big-screen brothers, it turned out that the portable edition of *Daikatana* was (and indeed, still is) really really good!

Publishers KEMCO decided against a Japanese and US release due to the original game's overwhelmingly negative reputation in those territories, so the handheld version ended up being released solely in Europe on the Game Boy Color (which had retained its Americanised spelling, because why not?). This is a completely different version of the game - instead of the overblown saga that featured in the PC and console editions,



Daikatana on the GBC is a neat and concise *Zelda*-lite RPG which is easily one of the standout titles on a system that these days doesn't get nearly as much love as it maybe should do.

The entire game received a massive shake-up, with all-new characters and a totally different storyline to the original. Players take control of Hiro Miyamoto, a lively young chap who begins the game practising in a dojo. A mysterious stranger appears and tells Hiro that the Daikatana - a powerful sword with the ability to bend the fabric of time - has been stolen by an evil character known as Kage, who is planning to use the sword to rewrite history. Suddenly, wouldn't you just know it, Kage appears and kidnaps Hiro's best friend! Now it's up to you/Hiro to find Kage, rescue your friend, reclaim the sword, and restore peace to the land!

The game plays out as a *Zelda*-style top-down dungeon crawler, and sees you scouring the terrain for clues, keys and

items that will help you defeat the boss in each of their respective puzzle-laden underground lairs. Due to the Daikatana's apparent time-travelling abilities, you'll find yourself wandering around a huge variety of locations, including a futuristic US army base, ancient Greece, and even, for some reason, Norway! During the course of the game, you'll pick up a couple of companions (the magnificently-named Superfly Johnson is a particular favourite), although the game decides who you control at various points rather than allowing you to switch between characters at will. What you can do, though, is decide which weapons you want to use, and there's a seriously massive list to choose from. Swords, laser beams, weird discus things, magical staves... Whatever you want, it's probably available.

According to our save file, our first playthrough lasted just over three and a half hours, so *Daikatana* clearly isn't as huge as some other RPGs. That said, the sheer amount of fun that the developers managed to cram into those few hours is truly remarkable. A hefty dose of exploration, a little bit of platforming (that's another thing - how many 8-bit top-down RPGs give you the ability to jump?), satisfying combat, a mind-bending story with a neat twist at the end, a huge variety of colourful locations and enemies, a likeable cast of characters, some amusingly not-very-well-written dialogue that could probably be best described as 'quirky', puzzles that can often be taxing but are never too obscure to solve without the aid of a walkthrough, decent sound design... this version of *Daikatana* is almost a 'best of the 8-bit era' all crammed into one tiny cartridge - it really does have pretty much everything you need for a fun afternoon of adventuring. Just remember that it's the Game Boy Color version you want - don't go anywhere near its big-screen cousins!



ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE
GUIDES YOU
THROUGH THE
REALM OF
TABLETOP GAMING



of his stress tokens to another ship. I imagine this is due to 4-LOM's cutting sarcasm and razor sharp wit. The Mist Hunter can also be equipped with a Tractor Beam, which is a pain in the bum for your opponent, especially those with TIE fighters. (Also, it show just how friendly the crew of the Mist Hunter are. All they want is a hug!) As heavy fighters go, it fills an important function in the Scum line up and is slightly better than the Rebel equivalent, the B-Wing. It's a little less agile than the B, but packs a bigger punch. Certainly, it has more options, but also requires more finesse to get the most of.

Staying with the bounty hunting bad-asses, we get Dengar's ship, the Punishing One, which is a modified JumpMaster 5000 scout ship. This particular spacecraft has become the 'must-have' model in the game at the moment. Whilst wandering around the various tournaments at UK Games Expo this year, we saw a lot of versions of this mini in play. It's easy to see why. It's a pre-painted, large-base, turret ship which looks a bit like a Millennium Falcon with some pieces cut out. Others may refer to it as a flying toilet seat. Dengar is the bounty hunter wrapped in white cloth with the sullen look on his face, but he makes up for a poor costume with a kickass ship. It's very nippy, able to turn on a dime and blast the heck out of pretty much anything. Its main weapon is a turret and it'll happily accept torpedoes, which means it can dominate the board, zooming round and mopping up enemies left and right. Well, mostly left; though the JumpMaster is enormously manoeuvrable with hard turns, s-loops, k-turns and other stunts, pretty much all of its stress-relieving green manoeuvres mean turning to the left.

Though I can see why people use three, it's also a little bit boring, especially when you consider that there are so many more fun ships to use in the Scum faction, such as Boba Fett's Firespray. It's worth noting that the JumpMaster allows you to have Fett as a crew member; you discard Fett to sabotage an enemy ship (hey, that jet pack of his must be good for something), knocking off an enemy upgrade in the process. This is appropriately sneaky and fits in with the feel of Scum faction. Still, if you want to set up three JumpMasters with lots of missiles and some generic pilots, you'll do well in a tournament and have not so much fun in a friendly game.

Not that Wave 8 is short of missiles. The Empire gets a look-in thanks to the Inquisitor's TIE (which can be seen in action in the TV series, *Star Wars Rebels*). This tidily painted TIE Advanced Prototype

When the *Star Wars: X-Wing Miniatures* game first came out, many of us gamer types were pretty sceptical. After all, tie-in space games have been and gone in the past, and we all firmly believed that there was a limit to the number of interesting spaceships you could get out of the *Star Wars* universe. How many ships past a TIE fighter, an X-wing and the Millennium Falcon can they squeeze into a range before it stops being fun?

Well, it turns out that there is pretty much a galaxy filled with cool ships out there, which is why it's such a popular game. Regular readers will know that over at the *STARBURST* Secret Thunderdome that we have a soft spot for the villains, and Fantasy Flight's most recent release of models (Wave 8) contains a bit of a bumper treat for those of us who don't like being Rebels. Or the Imperials. Let's face it, the most fun to be had playing *X-Wing* at the moment is with *Scum and Villainy*, and Wave 8 gave us two bounty hunter ships to play with.

First up is the pre-painted, small-base miniature G-1A Starfighter, aka the notorious Mist Hunter. Canonically, this is flown by *Star Wars*' very own odd couple, Zuckuss and 4-LOM. In case you aren't up on your *Star Wars* lore, these two are an insect-themed bounty hunting double act. 4-LOM is the robot that looks a bit like C-3PO but has a weird robot insect head, rather than a blank looking robot face. 4-LOM started out as a protocol droid, realised that a life of servitude was for suckers and went into crime in a big way. Zuckuss is a bug-faced dude in a heavy robe. Clearly, they're the one true pair of the bounty hunting world, and I like to think that their iconic spaceship doubles as the home they've always dreamed of settling down together in. Rules-wise, Zuckuss can roll extra dice on attacks, but gives opponents extra evade dice as he does so. Thematically, this shows that Zuckuss is a patient hunter, and in play it's a fun gamble. 4-LOM's power allows him to pass one

combines all the things you want from a TIE - speed, agility and quick moves - with firepower. Mostly missiles. Though it has light weapons (except for missiles), the Inquisitor himself is a tricky fellow who can be used to great effect. Works well as the leader of a squadron of TIEs, and if you fit it with enough tricks and bombs it'll turn the game around for you.

Of course, the big surprise of Wave 8 is the Ghost, which is the main ship the good guys use in *Star Wars Rebels*. It is, of course, a Rebel ship, and it's one of the largest models of its kind in the game. It's a large base ship and it just about fits on its pedestal. After all, in the TV show, this thing has three storeys, ample cargo space and is a home for a whole team of rebels.

The Ghost is rather lumbering in *X-Wing*, which makes sense, as it's a game about starship fighters, not light cruisers. Fans of the TV show will recall that the Ghost is great at avoiding Star Destroyers but struggles against the nippy TIE fighters. The thing moves like a pig, which is fine as it comes with turrets and its own heavy fighter, the Phantom.

The Ghost requires some careful thought to work in most games; you can't just barge in as it's a large and easy to shoot target. On the other hand, the model comes with so many new cards and extra crew that it's hard to know where to start. You can set up the Ghost to fulfil most roles, and because you can also fit it with a fighter of its own, you can control the board fairly easily (provided you place the Phantom sensibly). It's also just really, really cool. Ghost is also the second in a trend for 'large' models in *X-Wing*. Fingers crossed Scum will get a big ship soon (maybe something from Hondo Ohnaka's collection?). Though if this trend continues, the STARBURST Secret Thunderdome is going to need a bigger table.

One of the things that's interesting about the Ghost is that encourages lots of play styles. The recent UK Games Expo



hosted the largest *X-Wing* Tournament in the UK, the amazing Yavin Open. As I was covering the entire event for STARBURST, I didn't join in on the action but I did get to see what everyone was playing.

In addition to the silly amount of JumpMasters, Firesprays and oodles of X-wings, we saw some fun set-ups. One chap seemed to have a theme of lots of Z-95 Headhunters which he called his 'Doom Squad'. Doomed they were, Headhunters are a great support ship but make for a rubbish squad, but the player seemed to be having loads of fun anyway. It's telling that even with obvious 'winner' combos out in the gaming world, people are still using (and winning with) different combos.

UK Games Expo was almost certainly the largest gathering of *Star Wars X-Wing* players in Europe this year. The sheer concentration of geeky glee in one place

was probably enough to turn any Sith Lord to the Light Side. Fantasy Flight also had a few models from the forthcoming Wave 9, which looks pretty juicy.

For a start, they've continued with porting ships from the show *Star Wars Rebels*. The Shadow Caster is a ship we see briefly in the show and belongs to the young bounty hunter (and former friend of the hero Sabine) Ketsu Onyo. It's apparently going to be a fast moving, lightly armoured turret ship with a heavy tractor beam. Sounds like an unholy union of the JumpMaster 5000 and the Mist Hunter, and I have a feeling that all those three-ship JumpMaster lists aren't going to last long.

Scum are apparently going to get a light yet powerful fighter in the form of the Protectorate Starfighter. Canon-wise, it's a Mandalorian ship that looks lethal. It seems to be one of those things that will zoom in, hang around and then blow the heck out of the enemy. The rebels will be getting the ARC-170, which looks like what would happen if a praying mantis and an X-wing had children, though in a cool way. Apparently the ARC-170 was the ship Poe Dameron's mother flew back in the day. There's also going to be a *Heroes of the Resistance* pack, which is Poe Dameron's ship and a version of the Millennium Falcon with cards for Rey and Finn.

Finally, the First Order get a look-in with the Special Forces TIE. I suspect it's going to be the Swiss Army Knife of the bad guys range; I'll find out when I get my greasy gamer hands on one.

Of course, *Star Wars* isn't the only game that's getting a lot of play at the STARBURST Thunderdome; currently on regular rotation is *New York 1901*, *Camel Cup*, *Welcome to The Nightmare*, *Battle of the Bands* and *Ominoes*. All games we will be talking about very, very soon. Until next month, keep rolling those dice.

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UK GAMES EXPO (CREDIT: MIKE SMITH)

WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM
AROUND THE WEB
THIS MONTH WITH
JACK BOTTOMLEY



THAT'S THE LOOK... THE LOOK OF LOVE (AND INSANITY)

There are a lot of characters making their big screen debut in **Suicide Squad**, from scaly criminal Waylon Jones aka Killer Croc (Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje) to Captain Boomerang (Jai Courtney), but arguably the biggest - Harley aside - are Will Smith's turn as bullseye-hitting assassin Floyd Lawton, aka Deadshot, and Karen Fukuhara's sword-swinging warrior Katana. So, before Smith's assassin and Fukuhara's masked martial artist become popular Halloween costume choices for comic and movie lovers out there, get ahead of the curve with these neat Katana wig/masks and Deadshot light-up masks from halloweencostumes.co.uk, which are both darn good replicas of the characters' appearances in the forthcoming social media-buzzing movie. That said, it is likely these masks won't improve your swordsmanship (or should that be swordswomanship?) or your aim, so no fencing or trick shots around the house, please... no seriously, you don't want your own ballroom (or perhaps bathroom) blitz!

However, of all the fresh faces, the vexing villainess Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie) is the one that has most hearts and minds racing. And wherever Harley swings her mallet, her puddin' is often not far behind. Indeed, the chance to (finally) see Harley Quinn and The Joker (Jared Leto) together onscreen is the stuff of fans' wildest dreams. Whatever your thoughts on the new film's visual approaches to the two characters, we are all eagerly awaiting the results of their long overdue cinematic debut together. So to show your support for Mr. and Mrs. Arkham, spread the love (and chaos) with this shirt from emp-online.co.uk, which shows off our star couple alongside some loving (and rather disturbing) words... bless them.

KATANA WIG - £27.99 (EST. AVAILABILITY JULY 29TH)
DEADSHOT LIGHT-UP MASK - £18.99 (EST. AVAILABILITY AUGUST 19TH)
BOTH AVAILABLE FROM Halloweencostumes.co.uk

JOKER AND HARLEY T-SHIRT - £16.99
AVAILABLE FROM EMP-online.co.uk



SHIRTS WORTH GOING MAD OVER...

By now you ought to be clued up on David Ayer's eagerly anticipated **Suicide Squad**, a film that could very well make or break the DC Cinematic Universe after a poor/polarising/great start (you choose) in **Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice** this year. Whatever happens come August 5th, we have to admit **Suicide Squad** is one of the more unique films in the genre to come along in years, a kind of punk rock opposite to Marvel's vintage pop **Guardians of the Galaxy**... only a lot barmier. So as we get ready to sit back and let the madness flow over us like a chemical bath, here are two of the best of a whole bunch of shirts that we found online, in this issue's Squad-centric **Watto's Emporium**.

The redux skull poster (with a bony noggin artistically influenced by each main supervillain character) has been highly shared and admired, so this great shirt from **merchoid.com** is effortlessly cool, practically making you a walking squad poster! Also catching our targeting eye was this brilliantly designed Suicide Museum shirt from **teepublic.com**, designed by Andriu, and taking influence from **Futurama**, as it features the cartoonised heads of the forthcoming movie's lead characters. Seriously, what the hell is wrong with you people? "We're shirt designers, it's what we do."

SUICIDE SQUAD: IN SQUAD WE TRUST
SUBLIMATION T-SHIRT - £15.99
AVAILABLE FROM MERCHOID.COM

SUICIDE MUSEUM T-SHIRT - \$20.00 USD
AVAILABLE FROM TEEPUBLIC.COM



DRUNKEST. HEROES. EVER.

The cast of characters that are shooting, stealing and, y'know, saving the world are all mad enough sober, so can you envision what could happen if these babies were handed around at the next Amanda Waller briefing. We can only imagine what a pissed Killer Croc would be capable of, although one trailer did feature some bar-based chat so maybe we'll find out. Anyway, luckily your group of mates won't pose such problems... we think... so why not prepare for your next gathering with these official **Suicide Squad** shot glasses from **emp-online.co.uk** that literally allow you to toast all anti-heroes and hellraisers everywhere.

SUICIDE SQUAD SHOT GLASS SET - £11.99
AVAILABLE FROM EMP-ONLINE.CO.UK (ESTIMATED AVAILABILITY AUGUST 10TH)



STARBURST: EVENT PROFILE



WORDS: ED FORTUNE
PHOTOS: MIKE SMITH

UK GAMES EXPO Birmingham Hilton and NEC June 3rd - 5th, 2016

The United Kingdom sits in a strange place when it comes to the world of board gaming. The two nations that dominate the tabletop market are North America (specifically the US) and Germany, a country where it seems almost everyone grew up with a regular 'family board game' night. The UK has ties to both and has an enormous amount of access to both markets. The UK games scene has thrived for years, borrowing ideas from both giants of industry and producing something rather amazing. What it lacked is a major platform to showcase this growing hobby.

Enter the UK Games Expo, which has grown from a small gathering of geeks

ten years ago to a major, international event. UKGE 2016 saw the event step into the international spotlight and put Britain firmly on the gaming map. The Expo was hosted in two close-by locations: the Birmingham Hilton Hotel and NEC Hall 1, duties neatly divided between the two. NEC Hall 1 contained a great many trade stands, as various games companies showed off their new products. The variety available was staggering, from the established and world-renowned such as Mayfair Games and Fantasy Flight to the smaller gaming manufacturers showing off their first ever product.

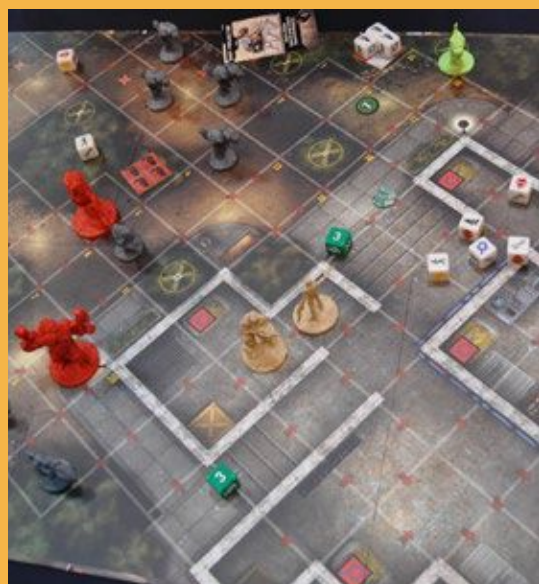
The main hall had demos galore, and you could have easily spent the entire weekend going from stall to stall playing exciting new games and talking to exhibitors. Every single possible theme and game was on display. Gaming accessories were also up for grabs. The lovely people at Geeknson had a raffle for their rather expensive but very beautiful gaming tables, and one of the stalls seemed to have every

single possible type of dice on display.

Promos and competitions continued throughout the day. Of note was a competition organised by Z-Man Games for *Pandemic: Reign of Cthulhu*. The game hadn't been released at the time and was keenly anticipated by players. It proved to be one of the many very popular games stalls.

The main hall was also where you could find some of the key guests. Though we had the likes of Colin Baker as guests, the crowds were really drawn to YouTube table top superstar Tom Vasel; it really does seem that gamers would rather see other gamers talk. The main seminar room was tucked away neatly into one corner but quite easy to find. The hall was a vast time sink, constantly changing and literally jammed with games. Even though it closed at 5pm, this did not mean the fun stopped, as there was plenty to do a short walk away at the Hilton.

The events in the Hilton were wide and varied; this is a festival-sized event with thousands of people, with so much going



on that you really have to pick your targets carefully. Seminars, tournaments and open gaming areas were all part of the schedule here. One of the particularly impressive things was the way the various workshops were handled. The popular gaming podcast *Sit Down and Shut Up* had an un-ticketed show in one of the main rooms, and *UKGE* crew were on hand to make sure that the queue didn't get out of hand. Other shows at the Expo included a hilarious parody of '80s-style 'choose your own adventure' games called *The Dark Room*. The room was dark; that's all we can tell you.

One of the biggest draws was the Yavin Open, a massive tournament for the world's most popular miniature game *Star Wars X-Wing*. Despite the huge numbers of *Star Wars* fans trying to blow each other up, the atmosphere was incredibly friendly and welcoming. It wasn't the only tournament, simply the biggest. Though the Hilton is a large building with many rooms, the staff were on hand to direct gamers to the room they needed to be in. This meant you were never in danger of missing that vital game.

Another popular draw was the various table top RPGs running. Many gamers took the opportunity to try out new games systems under the guidance of skilled GMs, and all of these games booked out by the end of the Friday. A small number of convention-style LARPs were also run, with fans getting drawn into strange worlds for a time.

Thanks to the way the event was put together, it was always possible to find a game to play and something to do. Table top gaming is, by its very nature, incredibly social and the organisers had fostered a welcoming and friendly event that meant you could always find someone to have fun with.

Overall, *UK Games Expo 2016* was a massive festival for what is rapidly becoming one of the UK's major pastimes. We at *STARBURST* can't wait to go again next year.



PAUL MOUNT'S



with Andrew Pollard

This month, **GAMES OF THRONES'** latest season comes to a thunderous conclusion, **PREACHER** and **OUTCAST** become many viewers' new favourite things, and we look at what **SUPERGIRL's** move to The CW means.

Welcome to **TV Zone**, just not necessarily as you know it. Whilst the incomparable Paul Mount takes leave of his monthly column for the next few issues, I've foolishly been tasked with handling all duties around these parts for the immediate future. Luckily for me, however, this has come at a time when many a TV show have been hitting it out of the park.

Given what's gone on over the past month or so, it would be majorly remiss not to address the conclusion of one genre heavyweight's sixth season. Yes, of course, I'm talking about HBO's **Game of Thrones**. With its sixth year now in the bag, **Thrones** has recently become whiter than white hot once more, reaching heights that the show has realistically not seen for a few seasons now. Last season may have ended with the brutal death of Jon Snow, and before that there was the infamous, heartbreaking **The Rains of Castamere** (also known simply as **The Red Wedding** – and yes, just the thought of it still brings a lump to the throat), but the series as a whole has not delivered a season as consistently good as this since its infancy. Key to the success of Season Six was the strength of the final two episodes. The penultimate **Battle of the Bastards** was phenomenal and featured one of the greatest set pieces in modern TV history when we saw the very-much-alive Jon Snow and his men battle the army of the nefarious Ramsay Bolton. This would all end with Ramsay, one very much deserving of the name 'bastard' by any definition, finally getting his comeuppance as he was beaten to a lifeless pulp by Jon before ultimately being devoured by the very hounds that he called his own. What has often been

the case with **Game of Thrones**, though, is that the penultimate episode of a season is the high point before the season finale itself is used to merely put pieces in place ahead of the next season. With its sixth season, mind, **Thrones** followed **Battle of the Bastards** up with an equally jaw-dropping season climax.

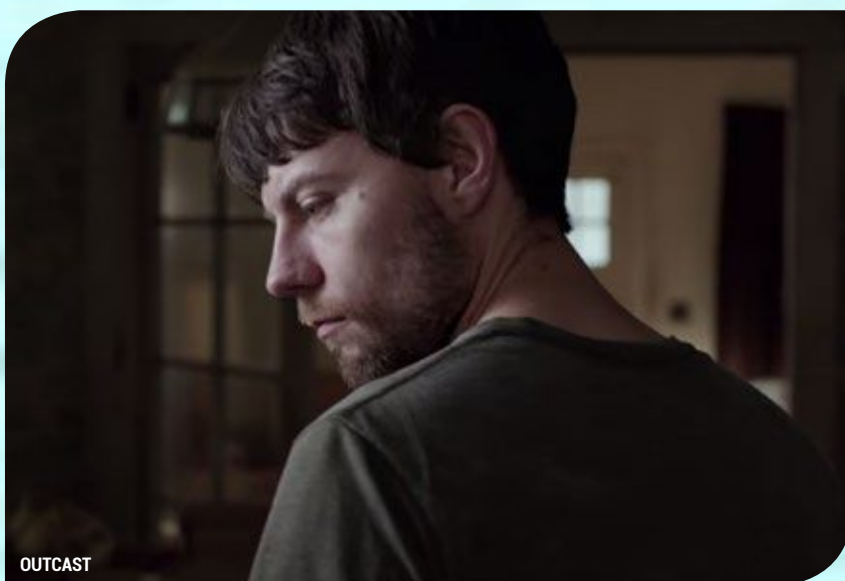
After six years of waiting (at least for TV audiences), we were actually given some semblance of closure to many of the loose ends of the series; Jon Snow was now the King of the North; Bran Stark's visions seemingly gave fans the confirmation that they've been waiting for that Jon is actually the son of Ned

Stark's sister, Lyanna, and Daenerys' older brother, Rhaegar Targaryen; Daenerys and her dragons have finally set sail for Westeros; the Tyrells have been literally blown up; Cersei has taken the Iron Throne following the suicide of poor Tommen; and Arya Stark finally got some revenge for **The Red Wedding** by slicing the throat of Walder Frey after turning his sons into pie filling! It was intense, engaging stuff, and that's without even touching upon the fantastic, iron-willed, take-no-bullshit Lady Mormont (the excellent young Bella Ramsey). And so begins the familiar and painful wait for the next season of **Game of Thrones**, which should be arriving next April if all goes to plan. Where does the series go from here? Seeing as the TV show is now entering the uncharted territory of having basically no reference points in the books to guide it, we're eager to see how things play out for this iconic show. With supposedly only two more seasons left, it's even been speculated that there could be merely fourteen more episodes before the show finally comes to an end. Whatever lies ahead for **Thrones**, it's certainly a tall order to top what we saw in the second half of Season Six.

From one classic favourite TV show to a new favourite of many, AMC's **Preacher** has been wowing audiences since it debuted in May. As this latest issue goes to print, we've managed to watch the first five episodes of the Dominic Cooper-starrer, and boy, is it all kinds of brilliant. Whilst it does differ in certain ways to the legendary source material from Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon, **Preacher** works perfectly on the small screen. For years, there was talk of adapting Ennis and Dillon's work into a movie, but the early response to the TV show suggests that *not* doing a big screen outing for Jesse Custer was the correct decision to make. The comic book series is just so vast, so detailed, and so rich, it would be near-impossible to do the titular character and



GAME OF THRONES



his cohorts justice in a two-hour picture. With networks now willing to invest heavily in TV shows overflowing with delicate storytelling and intricate details, 2016 was the perfect time for **Preacher** to be given a shot. And what a job the show has done so far. In the series, nobody is clean cut, nobody is completely innocent, and everybody is accountable for their actions. Added to that, it also seems as if this is the perfect vehicle to get the ever-charismatic Joe (or is that Joseph now?) Gilgun out to a global audience, with many UK viewers already familiar with him following his excellent work in **Misfits** and Shane Meadows' magnificent **This is England** series. With the trio of Cooper, Gilgun and Ruth Negga (as Tulip), the series' core characters are in good hands, and then there's Ian Colletti's Arseface, who is hopefully having his role in the show expanded from here on out. And who'd have thought that all of this was put together by Seth Rogen, Evan Goldberg, and their Point Grey Pictures production company? Already the show looks set to become a modern classic if it continues in the direction that it's heading.

Another new addition, which is also an AMC-produced show, is the equally-fantastic **Outcast**. Starring Patrick Fugit (he of **Almost Famous** fame), the show is based on the comic book of the same name from Robert Kirkman. Kirkman is also one of the minds who created **The Walking Dead**, and much like that comic book property, **Outcast** has already established itself as a brilliant adaptation that manages to follow its source material whilst also weaving its own path. Like **Preacher**, this is a show that is in its infancy, but it's certainly gone down well with fans and critics alike so far. Fugit plays Kyle Barnes, a troubled soul who has been possessed by demons since he was just a young boy. With the likes of **Bates Motel** and **The Walking Dead** currently between seasons, and **Hannibal**, **Penny Dreadful**, and **Damien** (which, let's face it, was pretty abysmal) cancelled, **Outcast** manages to terrifyingly fill the horror void

that some audiences may be suffering from when it comes to their TV habits. I guess there's always the cheesy, so-bad-it's-just-about-fun **Scream: The TV Series**, but **Outcast** is different gravy. Where **Preacher** and **Outcast** are both concerned, it's very much a case of 'fantastic start, keep up the great work'.

For those who read my last stint on **TV Zone** last year during a brief Paul Mount break, you'll remember that I've got a bit of a soft spot for The CW's DC-based output. And by bit of a soft spot, I mean I'm like a fat kid with cake when it comes to that stuff; as in I can't get enough of it and will overindulge myself until I'm firmly sick to my stomach. Luckily, I've yet to get to the stage of projectile vomiting and far too many bottom burps, even if the network has added yet another DC property to its ranks. With CBS deciding against renewing **Supergirl** for a second season, The CW wasted no time in snapping up Melissa Benoist's Maid of Might to add

to its world of **Arrow**, **The Flash**, and DC's **Legends of Tomorrow**. And, of course, that means we can expect a huge four-show crossover event come December, as already confirmed by network higher-ups.

All of those particular DC shows are currently on hiatus following the end of their respective seasons, but the addition of the Girl of Steel to The CW is certainly an interesting one. The first season of **Supergirl** was largely a mixed bag. As an actual comic book come to life, the show delivered on most levels; there were big action sequences, larger-than-life villains, and never a fear of embracing the cape and tights that some shows have shown a reluctance to do in years gone by (here's looking at you, **Smallville**). For better or worse, **Supergirl** was proud of its comic book roots and didn't miss an opportunity to show them off. As the titular heroine, Benoist was a revolution, part-girl next door, part-awkward geek, part-superpowered alien hero, but always engaging and never less than adorable. It has to be said, the show itself did seem to lose its way a little as the first season progressed, with it feeling as if the season's twenty episodes were just a tad too many for the season's actual story arc to manage, resulting in more filler than one would've hoped. With the show initially planned to have a thirteen-episode first year, it was only at a later date that the season was extended to a twenty-episode season, and this certainly showed in some of the episodes that followed the mid-season break. Regardless of this, though, Benoist's Supergirl managed to firmly step out of the shadow of her more famous cousin and a particular highlight of many a genre TV fan came during a crossover episode as Grant Gustin's Flash turned up in the alternative world of **Supergirl** for a one-and-done effort. The two former **Glee** stars were so cute together that they'd even melt the horror-heavy heart of our very own Martin Unsworth. Well, maybe. Either way, the chemistry between Benoist



and Gustin was the superhero equivalent of an online cat video. Adding more to the expectations surrounding **Supergirl's** second season, it's also been revealed that **Teen Wolf's** Tyler Hoechlin has signed on to play the Man of Steel, the Last Son of Krypton, Superman himself when the show returns in the second half of the year. **Supergirl** has so far given us sun-drenched shots of capes, not to mention plenty of MSN Messenger-esque chats, where Supes is concerned, but now we'll be seeing Superman fully fleshed-out and appearing in at least two episodes.

Whilst there promises to be some potentially brilliant moments ahead as **Supergirl** finds herself in the same world as the Scarlet Speedster, Green Arrow, Rip Hunter's Legends and a whole host of other familiar DC names, that's not to say that there weren't a few issues with what has recently come to an end in the world that the Maid of Might is shortly to enter. The oldest of these shows, **Arrow**, had arguably its most up-and-down season to date, with parts of the

show's fourth season not getting close to reaching the heights of what had gone before, particularly the jaw-dropping masterpiece that was its second season (which, to me, is the greatest complete season of any genre show of the past decade – bold statement, I know). Whilst Neil McDonough devoured every scene that he was in, his character of Damien Darhk and his magical powers didn't quite fit in the grounded world that **Arrow** had spent the previous three seasons constructing. I get it – the show was given more creative license with characters and powers after **The Flash** and its meta-human-filled streets – but the notion of magic totems, particularly when the action was centred on the Lian Yu flashbacks, was as dull as waiting in a doctors' waiting room for an hour longer than you'd hoped. Then things all went a little **Truman Show**-lite as Darhk created his own perfect bubble while attempting to destroy the rest of the world. It wasn't necessarily a bad season all round for **Arrow**, but it's certainly a case of the show has plenty of room to improve ahead of its upcoming fifth season. Key to any improvement needs to be, dare I say, the removal of one of the more romantic elements of the show. The reason for hesitancy in that statement is because I, like many an **Arrow** fan, have been willing for Ollicity – the couple of Oliver Queen and Felicity Smoak – to become an official thing. It did and they were, yet the show ended up undoubtedly suffering for this, with the whole 'we're an item, we're getting married, oh wait a minute... yeah, we've broken things off' arc of the season doing some serious damage to Emily Bett Rickards' Felicity character in the eyes of many. From the idyllic crush of fanboys across the globe, Felicity had become a whiny, needy, inconsiderate, and unsympathetic character by the time Season Four came to an end. Luckily, Willa Holland's Thea Queen was one of the major positive points of the season, with her descent into bloodlust making for some of the year's **Arrow** highlights. Plus, the dour, bland and frustrating Laurel Lance (Katie Cassidy) has been killed off, which is something that was cheered by many in a move that was quite sad to see considering how important the comic book Black Canary is. Going forward, however, it looks as if Amell's Green Arrow is going to be working mainly with Felicity. Well, apart from the new additions set to arrive in Star City, namely DC's Vigilante and Wild Dog, both anti-hero sorts who will reportedly be taken under the mentorship of the Emerald Archer.

Whilst **Arrow** may have floundered a little, **The Flash** fared far better with its most recent season as Grant Gustin's Sultan of Speed was tormented by uber-rogue Zoom, who was revealed to be Hunter Zolomon. The big question now, though, is what lies ahead for the show, for the Season Two finale saw Barry Allen travel back in time to stop



his mother from being murdered at the hands of Eobard Thawne's Reverse-Flash. In the comic book realm, the **Flashpoint** arc featured Barry doing this exact same thing, which, in turn, led to the present day world going to the dogs: Bruce Wayne died instead of his parents; Thomas Wayne became an alcoholic, brutal Batman; Martha Wayne became the Joker; Wonder Woman and Aquaman were involved in a rip-roaring war against each other that left the globe in tatters; Kal-El was taken in as a military experiment upon landing on Earth, meaning there is no Superman; and Cyborg, one of DC's most boring heroes (he'll always be a Teen Titan to me – none of this Justice League bollocks!), is the world's great shining hope. How **Flashpoint** is adapted for TV remains to be seen, but expect to see some major changes in present day Central City when **The Flash** returns later this year.

Righto, so there we go. That's **TV Zone** in the bag, and I didn't even get to talk about **DC's Legends of Tomorrow** or **Bates Motel** (although Mr. Mount covered that show brilliantly in last month's issue – can it really only have just one more season left? I know that just one more year makes perfect sense with how the story is progressing, but I could seriously watch the world of Freddie Highmore's **Norman Bates** all day long...). Hopefully, this column was as painless for you as it was for me. Now I'm off to check what ominous present Mountie has left for me in the **TV Zone** basement. If I'm not back by next month, send whiskey, the **Arrow** Season Two Blu-ray, and Drew Barrymore. +

Contact me via the magic of email at andrew.pollard@starburstmagazine.com or do the Twitter thing @culturedleftpeg.

ALSO SCREENING



SHARKNADO: THE 4TH AWAKENS

Not a TV show, but another straight-to-TV offering for this so-bad-it's-really-really-bad franchise. Expect sharks and tornadoes in the most unlikely of places as Ian Ziering, Tara Reid (yep, she's back), and David Hasselhoff are joined by the likes of Gary Busey, Alexandra Paul, Frank Mir, Slipknot's Corey Taylor and WWE superstar Seth Rollins.

Screening July 31st on Syfy UK

BOJACK HORSEMAN - SEASON 3

Who doesn't love an alcoholic, down-and-out once-famous horse voiced by Will Arnett? BoJack's third season will be upon us before you know it.

From July 22nd on Netflix

THE STRAIN

Whilst we don't have an exact airing date just yet, FX's Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan-created horror series is back to turn more stomachs and get you gnawing at those fingernails.

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it's only a movie

a column by JORDAN ROYCE



Friday the 24th of June 2016 and the UK celebrate their INDEPENDENCE DAY (Aliens take note - next time just force a referendum on us - same result!)

In the world of STARBURST, this has been one hell of a week.

I am going to assume that not all of you live and breathe this magazine. For those that do, and listen to the STARBURST Radio Show (every Wednesday at 9pm on fabradiointernational.com), you will know that the show was nominated for the **Best UK Podcast** in the **UK Podcasters Awards 2016**. The same week, we also managed to get the amazing Toby Whithouse to join us at the STARBURST International Film Festival 2016 in what promises to be an awesome weekend. We were on a roll. If only I knew then how the week would pan out...

Saturday, June 18th, 2016 started out OK. I arrived in London for the Awards. Checked into the hotel, but then promptly realised that I had left my laptop, iPad full of comics, and hard drives full of STARBURST artwork in the bloody taxi. 5pm and already borderline suicidal. A record even for me!

A quick change into black tie and I was on my way in an Uber to the Amba Hotel in Mayfair. Blimey, this was going to be a posh do. Myself, some friends, and our very own advertising guru Andrew Keates were then promptly mugged by London bar prices for some Japanese whisky, before settling down to hear our fate. Thanks to the readers of STARBURST and the listeners of the Radio Show, we had punched way above our weight for an independent publisher. From thousands, we were through to the final ten. It was to be from this ten that the winner would be chosen based half on Twitter votes, and the rest on the decision of the Judges. Now, to be fair, I hate these things. People talk such bibble and nonsense about how it is the taking part that matters. Nah, it's winning. Just check out the famous Oscars clip of Samuel L. Jackson when he lost.

Turns out that whilst it was an honour to be there, we *did*, in fact, lose. Which is a bugger. We lost to a *cough* knitting show *cough*. I refuse to discuss this matter any further, however, our Twitter votes did seem to suggest a different outcome.

Four hours later, we were all slaughtered in **Napoleon's Casino**

in Leicester Square. My favourite tiny little bar, which looks like Arthur Daley might wander in at any moment. We played Blackjack, resulting in me returning back to the hotel with at least some consolation funds, and a weird dream recollection of a letter that said someone called Dave had my laptop. Upon my eventual awakening, there was indeed a letter. From a taxi driver called Dave, and he was bringing my stuff back (for a few pennies, of course) in a few days.

Flash forward a few hours and I am on my way with my friend to see **Aladdin** at the Prince Edward Theatre. Now, turns out jumping on the Tube at the last minute in a rush to get there on time is not a great idea. The doors don't do that *lift thing*. They hold you trapped with your bottom half hanging out of the train as you approach the tunnel. An **Incredible Hulk** moment got me free as I managed to push the doors apart somehow. Was the play worth it? Well, the Genie was thankfully great and not a Robin Williams knockoff, but having the curtains come down after twenty minutes for a tech disaster continued this weekend in the vein to which I was becoming accustomed.

In the end, Dave did drop my stuff off, and I figured getting back to Manchester for **Independence Day** was wise. Before something *else* happened. Talk about a *lost weekend*!

Now, the **Independence Day** to which I was returning was the sequel to the 1996 movie, which I chose to ironically see on Thursday, June 23rd, 2016. **Independence Day: Resurgence** (dire title) left me feeling a bit odd when the credits rolled. I knew it was not as good as the original, but for many reasons. I feel the biggest mistake

was the decision to have just one massive ship 3,000 miles in diameter attack. That made it feel less of an alien invasion, more of a monster movie. A feeling further accentuated by the presence of a rip-off Alien Queen from **Aliens**. Rather than a build-up felt around the entire planet running alongside some gentle character development of an impressive stellar cast, a big ship arrives and starts attacking before we even know why we should care. It lacks the feeling of global extermination that the original delivered.

Independence Day: Regurgitate also suffers from a notable cast downgrade. *Not Thor* is just another boring Australian, whilst Jessie T. Usher as the son of Will Smith's Captain Steven Hiller has clearly had a total charisma bypass. Will Smith is sorely missed in this flick! Besides Brent Spiner, there is an anaemic level of characterisation, and little sense of investment in their plight. Even Spiner's character Dr. Brackish Okun was robbed of being overtly gay by some shit bag shuffling in the edit suite.

The effects are OK, but no real improvement on those in the original. In fact, they also lack that massive sense of scale for some reason. The effects are used best when showcasing the divergent (gotta be careful with those 'ent' words) nature of a world unnaturally enhanced by the tech left behind from the previous wave of aliens.

Independence Day: Regurgitate lacks the measured approach of the original. Instead Emmerich is in full-blown 2012 mode, with long improbable and jokey scenes of devastation that are easily flown around. It also lacks that genuine **The Towering Inferno**-era all-star cast that the original recaptured so well. It's not a bad way to waste a few fun hours, but I guarantee you will not revisit it as much as its more restrained predecessor.

Finally, to finish off the worst week in living memory, I returned home to find that Independence Day had happened for real. Except this real version actually was chock full of characterisation, and tons of tension.

Life really is a bitch sometimes...

Jordan Royce can be contacted at jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com and hosts the STARBURST Radio Show every Wednesday 9pm until 11pm GMT on Fab Radio International – www.fabradiointernational.com also available from iTunes as a Podcast

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